

March 3, 2010

Media Statement

SEVEN CANCER RESEARCH GRANTS FOR WAIMR SCIENTISTS

Seven scientists at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) have been handed a total of \$400,000, as part of \$1.8 million in funding awarded by the Cancer Council Western Australia's research program.

Head of WAIMR's Cancer Epidemiology group Professor Lin Fritschi has received \$70,000 for a project which aims to make Australian workplaces safer by understanding more about possible cancer causing agents.

Professor Fritschi and her team will compile a list of more than 50 possible carcinogenic substances and elements and examine the risk they pose to workers by surveying 5000 people.

"There is a real need to shed light into this area in Australia because unlike many other countries, we don't yet have the data available that will help us pinpoint any risk factors. We hope our work will ultimately help us understand what we should be phasing out and replacing in workplaces to make them safer," she said.

Some of the possible carcinogens under the microscope will be asbestos, silica, benzene, shift work, lack of exercise in desk jobs and sun exposure.

Also the recipient of \$70,000 is WAIMR deputy director Professor Peter Leedman, who will continue work investigating the role of the gene SLIRP in colorectal cancer.

Awarded \$70,000 in funding, WAIMR Professor David Ravine and Associate Professor Evan Ingley will embark on a project that will examine the potential of a drug, currently used to treat ovarian cancer, to understand autism.

The duo's investigation is based on a missing building block in one of the rare genetic conditions of autism. A WAIMR team led by Professor Ravine recently noticed this building block appeared to be mimicked by a molecule in the anti-cancer drug.

The team will now look closely at the details of how this molecule works and whether it could be harnessed to help treat autism.

Dr Ingley was also the recipient of a \$70,000 grant for his work examining interactions within protein networks, aiming to pinpoint which connections are altered in diseases including cancer, leukaemia, diabetes and immune problems.

Head of WAIMR's Laboratory for Liver Disease and Carcinogens, Professor George Yeoh has been awarded the Lions Cancer Institute Research Grant of \$70,000 for his work into tracking liver progenitor cells to determine what causes them to become cancerous. With the funds Professor Yeoh plans to buy consumables, grow and study liver progenitor cells and hire a part-time assistant.

Our young scientists have been awarded two of three inaugural Suzanne Cavanagh Early Career Investigator Grants of \$25,000, which support the work of promising young researchers in WA.

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Dr Mitali Manzur, a research associate at WAIMR's Laboratory for Angiogenesis and Tumour Immunology will put her funding towards research into the blood vessels in cancer tumours and how they might be altered to make chemotherapy more effective.

Postdoctoral research associate Dr Stefan Davies, in the Laboratory for Mitochondrial Medicine and Biology, will use the grant in his investigations into the role of mitochondrial RNA processing in prostate cancer.

WAIMR director Professor Peter Klinken said he was proud of all scientists and was pleased to see their work supported by the health community.

"Grant schemes such as this one initiated by the Cancer Council Western Australia are incredibly important to medical researchers and future health," he said.

"I know these dollars will be put to very good use by our scientists who are highly dedicated to their work."

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