MEDIA RELEASE

New grants to support research commercialisation

New research grants to help transform medical research ideas into commercial outcomes were announced today.

Worth $15.2 million, the 26 NHMRC Development Grants support the commercial development of a range of products, processes and procedures that if successfully developed, will result in improved health care, disease prevention or provide health cost savings.

They include an injectible filler to repair bones, a new sperm sorting device to reduce male infertility and improve IVF outcomes and a device to improve the quality of cancer imaging and treatment precision, amongst other ideas.

NHMRC CEO Professor Warwick Anderson said the grants were an important mechanism for encouraging the translation of research into health outcomes.

“Many of these grants are supported by leading Australian biotechnology companies which contribute intellectual property advice, salaries to support researchers, access to equipment and marketing expertise,” Professor Anderson said.

“This collaboration is crucial to the translation of research and the creation of new industries in Australia,” he said.

Companies supporting grants in these rounds include big names such as Elastagen, Cochlear, Genea, Siemens Healthcare and GlaxoSmithKline.

“Australia has an incredibly strong track record of translating research into commercial outcomes and we have been responsible for a range of successful commercial health outcomes including the bionic ear, the cervical cancer vaccine and spray-on skin for burns victims,” Professor Anderson said.

“I look forward to following these grants on their path to commercialisation, many of which have the potential to both substantially improve human health as well as create economic prosperity for Australia,” he said.

The grants were part of a $123.5 million dollar announcement made today by the Minister for Health Sussan Ley.
Grant highlights

Dr Lindsay Wu, University of New South Wales ($559,714)

While chemotherapy is an indispensable tool in the treatment of cancer, it may also trigger side effects akin to those experienced in the ageing process such as cardiovascular disease, infertility and inflammatory diseases. Dr Wu and his team have partnered with a start-up company to develop new drugs that could help counter these effects.

Team: Professor David Sinclair

Professor Paul Keall, University of Sydney ($588,475)

Professor Keall and his colleagues have created a biofeedback device to assist cancer patients to breathe predictably while undergoing radiotherapy. Unpredictable breathing can result in the beam hitting healthy tissue instead of the tumour. This biofeedback device will undergo clinical evaluation and technological assessment in a randomised clinical trial with support from the Breathe Well start-up company.

Team: Professor Judy Kay, Dr Ricky O’Brien, Professor Tomas Kron, Professor Peter Greer, Mr Malcolm Hebblewhite, Dr Amit Sawant

Professor Hong Zhang, Centre for Eye Research Australia ($584,165)

This research supports the development of a non-invasive treatment for the degenerative eye condition keratoconus. Current treatment involves lifting the protective layer of the cornea to apply riboflavin to the central region of the cornea – a procedure which can be painful and carries many risks of complications. Professor Zhang will work with Seagull Technologies to develop a polymer gel that, combined with a delivery device invented by the company, can release riboflavin into the cornea safely and without the need for any incision.

Team: Associate Professor Mark Daniell, Professor Greg Qiao, Dr Harry Unger, Dr Elsie Chan, Dr Katharina Ladewig, Professor Jonathan Crowston

Further information

More information about the grants announced today can be found on the NHMRC website under Outcomes of funding rounds.

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