

MEDIA RELEASE

RHH Research Foundation invests in new areas of Medical Research

The Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation will celebrate local health and medical research this Friday evening 26 June at our 2015 Research Excellence Dinner to be held at the Hotel Grand Chancellor, hosted in partnership with St.LukesHealth.

The 2015 Research Excellence Dinner provides an opportunity to acknowledge the latest cohort of grant recipients, while also showcasing the considerable achievements of a number of current researchers.

As the Foundation's Chief Executive Officer, Ms Heather Francis explains, *"the event is a formal celebration of excellence, a special occasion where we recognise the contributions being made in health and medical research across Tasmania by those funded through the Research Foundation."*

"The evening will feature presentations by current researchers, both emerging and highly skilled, who will showcase how their findings directly contribute to the wellbeing of our community state-wide. A particular highlight will also be the keynote address by special guest Professor John Challis, currently Pro Vice-Chancellor (Health & Medical Research) & Deputy Dean (Medicine) University of Western Australia," Ms Francis says. *"John has a real passion for changing the focus of medical research to better embrace the importance of improved health outcomes across the broader community. It is a real honour to welcome Professor Challis as our key speaker for this year's celebration, particularly given his success in building greater opportunities for applied health research in his homeland, Canada."*

This year's Research Excellence Dinner also gives the RHH Research Foundation an opportunity to celebrate the launch of a significant new research grant category. Worth almost \$0.5m, this investment is designed to generate knowledge, enhance clinical practice and most importantly, drive improvements to the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

Dr Charlotte McKercher is a 2015 recipient of a three year Project Grant. Dr McKercher's body of research focuses on the psychosocial determinants of treatment pathways, clinical outcomes and costs in Tasmanians with advanced chronic kidney disease.

Dr McKercher explains more about her body of research: *"This is a state-wide study which will assess all adults with advanced chronic kidney disease in renal services to describe the influence of both psychosocial and medical influences on disease progression with an emphasis on treatment pathways, clinical outcomes and associated costs. This will support better informed decision-making and optimal use of healthcare funding for renal care."*

The RHH Research Foundation acknowledges and thanks all supporters and donors for their ongoing commitment to healthcare and medical research.

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Media event launch:

Interview and photo opportunity with RHHRF CEO Heather Francis, Professor John Challis and 2015 Project Grant Recipient Dr Charlotte McKercher.

11.00am, Friday 26 June 2015

Board-room, Ray White Southern Tasmania, Ground Floor, 25 Argyle Street Hobart

For more info: RHHRF CEO, Heather Francis - 0407 201 113

Research Grant Recipients - 2015

New Starter Grants for 2015

Using commercially available technology to increase intensity of practice after stroke.

Dr Michele Callisaya.

Stroke survivors spend most of the day inactive, but intensive repetitive practice improves function. We aim to carry out a pilot study to determine whether a commercially available activity monitor can increase the intensity of therapy in the home after stroke.

Novel molecules of heparin for the management of asthma. *Dr Niall Stewart.*

Heparin, a widely used anticoagulant, has shown promising results in the management of asthma. We have separated the heparin molecule into anti-coagulant and anti-asthmatic fractions, and have identified two of these fractions with remarkable treatment potential. We will test these two fractions *in vitro* on persons with asthma and in healthy controls to characterise their effects on the immune system, and to identify the immune cells involved.

Preventing breast and gynaecological cancers in women with hereditary cancer syndromes.

Dr Jo Burke.

Women carrying BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations have a 50%-70% lifetime risk of breast cancer and a 10%–40% lifetime risk of ovarian cancer. Genetic testing is intended to empower these women to take steps to prevent cancers developing (i.e. chemoprevention or prophylactic mastectomy). But do women take advantage of these options?

Is *Haemophilus haemolyticus* a pathogen? *Dr Roger Latham.*

People with respiratory tract diseases have many bacterial species present in their sputum. *Haemophilus haemolyticus* is frequently present but until now is assumed to be harmless. This project will investigate whether *H. haemolyticus* is able to cause disease.

New Project Grant for 2015

The psychosocial determinants of treatment pathways, clinical outcomes and costs in Tasmanians with advanced chronic kidney disease. *Dr Charlotte McKercher.*

This state-wide study will assess all adults with advanced chronic kidney disease in renal services to describe the influence of both psychosocial and medical comorbidities on disease progression, treatment pathways, clinical outcomes and associated costs. This will support better informed decision-making and optimal use of healthcare funding for renal care.

New Clinical grants for 2015

Prevalence and virulence of an emerging bacterial pathogen of Tasmanian cystic fibrosis patients. *Dr Louise Roddam.*

Pandoraea, an emerging bacterial pathogen of cystic fibrosis is difficult to identify, is of unknown clinical significance and was recently isolated from a Tasmanian CF patient. We will investigate the Prevalence of Pandoraea in Tasmanian CF patients, describe its virulence potential and investigate its susceptibility to our new antimicrobial therapy.

Development of a therapeutic agent for chemotherapy-induced neuropathy. *Prof Bruce Taylor.*

Chemotherapy-induced neuropathy (CIN) is a dose-limiting side effect of cancer treatment, causing chronic, irreversible disability in 40% of cancer survivors. CIN results from the loss or damage of neurons during chemotherapy. We have compelling evidence that the protein metallothionein promotes regeneration of nerves, and examine its therapeutic use in CIN.

Profiling and functional studies of drug transporters in colorectal cancer: a pilot study in Tasmanian patients. *Dr Louise Nott.*

Tumour resistance severely limits the usefulness of chemotherapy for colorectal cancer. It is caused by compromised drug accumulation in tumour cells. We will characterise the expression and function of drug transporters in colorectal cancer to identify potential therapeutic targets to overcome the resistance to chemotherapy.

Development of a decision support smartphone app to improve antithrombotic prescribing in atrial fibrillation. *Dr Leanne Chalmers.*

People with atrial fibrillation (AF, a common heart rhythm abnormality) require anti-clotting medications to reduce their risk of stroke. This project aims to develop and evaluate a decision support smartphone application ('app') to assist prescribers to choose the best anti-clotting medication for each person with AF.

Non-anticoagulant molecules of heparin for the management of ulcerative colitis. *Dr Rahul Patel.*

Heparin has shown promising results in the management of ulcerative colitis (UC) but it is associated with a significant bleeding risk. This study will identify heparin molecules with in vivo anti-ulcerative colitis activity that lack anti-coagulant activity. This study will also identify and compare UC biomarkers in mice and patients in preparation for clinical trials.

Finding the right ventilator settings in patients with respiratory failure. *Dr Graeme Zosky.*

More than 30% of patients with acute respiratory syndrome die. Unfortunately, many of these deaths are due to our inability to appropriately ventilate the lungs when they fail. We aim to use a state of the art imaging technology to identify the best method for ventilating the lungs.