

Friday 5 February 2016

## MEDIA RELEASE

# RHH Research Foundation announces grant recipients for Tasmanian health research in 2016

The Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation today announced details of its grant funding for 2016, providing six new annual starter grants and five new annual establishment grants, and one significant three year project grant, all supporting local medical research to be undertaken in Tasmania.

The Research Foundation's Chair, Mr Trent Sayer, explained "the purpose of these grants is to assist emerging and highly skilled clinical researchers to collaborate with each other for the benefit of the local community. Each grant category is designed to nurture further expertise and research capacity while also delivering improved health and well-being for us all."

"Over its eighteen years of grant funding, the Foundation has focused strongly upon supporting research into medical conditions and approaches to healthcare that are of particular relevance to the Tasmanian community, investing almost \$7m to support projects undertaken by local clinicians," Mr Sayers said.

After an intensely competitive selection process, the range of projects chosen for funding offers a broad scope of intended benefit for the wellbeing of many Tasmanians, with potential that is even more far-reaching.

For example, the Foundation will support a research team guided by Clinical Associate Professor Marcus Skinner to determine the effectiveness of a new and unique anaesthetic airway device called the **LMAGastro™**. The device offers upper gastrointestinal airway protection and may indeed save lives. It is anticipated that this project will significantly enhance patient safety during upper gastrointestinal procedures by protecting the airway against obstruction while still allowing reliable access to this area during surgery. This would lead to a significant and positive change in practice.

This multi-disciplinary project also represents a new collaboration between the departments of Anaesthesia and Gastroenterology at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH).

Chief Executive Officer Heather Francis emphasised that research supported by the RHH Research Foundation is selected via a rigorous assessment process undertaken by the Foundation's scientific research advisory panel, which is endorsed by the National Health & Medical Research Council (NH&MRC).

"Facing a highly competitive field of applications from interested clinicians, only projects and researchers of excellence can be selected to pursue their investigations. Even then, in every funding round we are overwhelmed with applications from a community of eager researchers based within and around the RHH. This demonstrates a need for continuing and increased support from across our general and business communities for this vital work," she said.

"On this occasion, the Research Foundation has been oversubscribed by researchers' applications that amounted to more than six times above the funds available. There were many excellent projects submitted which, had funding been available, could have been considered further.

“There’s great scope for additional investment in high quality local health and medical research and this is something the RHH Research Foundation aims to achieve with the community’s support through our fundraising initiatives,” she said.

As a completely independent entity, the RHH Research Foundation provides an important role in supporting specialist doctors, nurses and allied health professionals with research interests through its annual grants program. With a strong emphasis on collaboration, this latest round of funding includes researchers from the RHH, and various areas of the University of Tasmania including the Menzies Research Institute, together with the CSIRO.

“In total, the Foundation has budgeted over \$610,000 to support local health and medical research through grant funding in 2016,” highlighted Ms Francis.

*-Ends-*

**For more info:** CEO Heather Francis 0407 201 113

**Interview available:** CEO RHH Research Foundation Heather Francis and Clinical Associate Professor Marcus Skinner  
11.00am, Wednesday 10 February 2016  
Hadley’s Orient Hotel foyer

## Research Grant Recipients - 2016

### New Starter Grants for 2016

#### **Study of automated neonatal targeting of oxygen – resuscitation trial 1 (the SANTO-R1 study)**

*Dr Sanoj Ali*

For preterm infants requiring breathing support at birth, studies have shown that oxygen levels which are either too high or low are both detrimental for the baby. We plan to investigate for the first time whether a device providing automated control of oxygen supply can more effectively target the desired range of oxygen levels in the first minutes of life in preterm infants. This would be a significant advance in the care of these critically ill babies.

#### **Linking exercise blood pressure to clinical outcomes: the EXERcise stress Test collaboration (EXERTION) Tasmanian pilot study.**

*Dr Martin Schultz*

The EXERcise stress Test collaboration (EXERTION) aims to link clinical exercise testing results to cardiovascular disease outcomes, to provide the first-ever evidence-based thresholds for abnormal exercise blood pressure. Results will inform clinical guidelines, providing supervising clinicians with signposts of cardiovascular risk upon which to optimise patient management and follow-up care.

#### **Investigating the physical and chemical Y-site incompatibility of injectable antifungals and parenteral nutrition solution**

*Mr Troy Wanandy*

Simultaneous intravenous administration of nutrition solution and injectable antifungals is often required in cancer patients. The compatibility between newer antifungals and parenteral nutrition is unknown. Hence, timely administration of lifesaving antifungals or much needed nutrition can be delayed awaiting separate intravenous line access. Therefore, it is important to urgently study their compatibilities to facilitate the timely administration of antifungals and parenteral nutrition to cancer patients.

#### **The Tasmanian electronic falls ascertainment tool (TASeFALL)**

*Dr Michele Callisaya*

Falls are extremely common in older people. The aim of this project is to test the feasibility and validity of the Tasmanian electronic falls ascertainment tool (TASeFALL) for use in research studies and clinical practice.

**Assessing the HR-HPV types in stored cervical excision samples for comparison with anal HR-HPV carriage in TasGANS - *Dr Steve Simpson Jr.***

We previously showed a significant association of post-toilet front-to-back and dabbing behaviours with occurrence of anal cancer precursors and cancer-causing HPV types. We want to substantiate the within-person autoinoculation route by comparing HR-HPV types present in stored cervical excision samples with those found in TasGANS anal samples.

**Investigating the burden of childhood fever on Tasmanian families and the Royal Hobart Hospital's Emergency Department - *Dr Bonnie Bereznicki***

This project will describe the presentations to the Royal Hobart Hospital emergency department by children with fever, investigate the knowledge, beliefs and perceptions about childhood fever among parents and caregivers in Tasmania, and develop an educational package for parents and caregivers about childhood fever.

## **New Establishment Grants for 2016**

**Assistive technology for motor rehabilitation - *Dr Andreas Duenser***

There are few rehabilitation options for people with little to no upper limb movement after stroke. The aim of this project is to test the feasibility of a new robotic rehabilitation system coupled with a Brain-Computer Interface and eye-gaze tracking to improve arm function.

**Improved clinical assessment of blood pressure - *Assoc Prof James Sharman***

Clinical blood pressure is usually measured by doctors but can result in falsely elevated or highly variable readings, which is a major problem for correct diagnosis and clinical care. This study will test a new, quick and automated method to measure blood pressure that is expected to improve clinical care.

**Study of automated neonatal targeting of oxygen – trial B (the SANTO-B study) - *Prof Peter Dargaville***

We have developed an automated inspired oxygen controller, which in preliminary studies is very effective in keeping oxygen levels in the desired range in premature infants. The function of the controller has been further enhanced, allowing it to self-tune to an infant's needs to predict drops in oxygen levels, and to be operated by bedside caregivers. We will now conduct a further evaluation of the device, operated independently by bedside caregivers under standard clinical conditions.

**Determining the utility of a novel, modified anaesthetic airway device that facilitates upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and airway protection - *Clinical Assoc Prof Marcus Skinner***

Potential life-threatening airway and respiratory compromise occurs frequently when upper gastrointestinal procedures are performed under heavy sedation or general anaesthesia with an unprotected airway. We will investigate the utility of a world-first, Tasmanian developed modified anaesthetic airway device, the **LMAGastro™**, whose design features include a dedicated channel for the passage of an endoscope directly to the oesophagus and a second dedicated channel for airway control. This multi-disciplinary project represents a new collaboration between the departments of Anaesthesia and Gastroenterology at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH).

**Mixed Meal Challenge: A new diagnostic test for screening pre-diabetes - *Dr Michelle Keske***

Pre-diabetes is diagnosed using the oral glucose tolerance test. We have data demonstrating this test causes acute microvascular insulin-resistance in healthy people reducing the effectiveness of this test for screening at-risk individuals. We will determine whether a liquid mixed meal challenge (carbohydrate, protein and fat) is a more sensitive test.

## **New Project Grant for 2016**

**Improved cardiovascular Disease HEALTH service delivery in Australia (the IDEAL study) - *Dr Martin Schultz***

This program will establish and test the clinical value of a health service method to deliver patient cardiovascular (CV) risk information to general practitioners. This new method to measure and report absolute CV risk will be developed within Tasmanian Pathology Services and tested by clinical trial with linkage to CV outcomes.