

3 December 2014

MEDIA RELEASE

No Tasmanian deaths since Jack Jumper allergy program was launched in 2003

Since inception in 1997, the RHH Research Foundation has invested over \$6 million dollars in local medical research for disease and conditions that are more prevalent in Tasmania. This includes critical medical research into the treatment of allergic reactions to Jack Jumper stings. This is very much an issue in Tasmania and Victoria where Jack Jumpers dwell in great numbers, not only in remote rural areas but increasingly in more densely populated metropolitan locations.

Jack Jumpers are highly aggressive and actively attack victims, leaving painful welts and localised swelling on their victim. But in some cases, the impact doesn't end there. A bite from this ant can prove to be life threatening for many, including young children, who may go into anaphylactic shock after being stung. In rural areas this poses a huge threat as urgent medical help is not always close at hand, leaving some Tasmanians living in fear for their life.

But the majority of patients who have benefited from a desensitisation program developed as a consequence of the Foundation's earlier research grant funding have experienced a significant reduction in their allergic reaction to a Jack Jumper sting. This success would not have been possible without medical research originally founded by Prof Simon Brown and first funded by the RHH Research Foundation in its inaugural annual grant round in 1998.

As part of the desensitisation program, patients attend the Jack Jumper clinics in Hobart and Burnie for a set period of time, receiving increasing doses of Jack Jumper venom which encourages the patient's body to build a tolerance, and in most cases leads to a lesser reaction to a Jack Jumper sting in the future. Importantly, as a result of this program of medical research, no Tasmanians have died from a Jack Jumper sting since the allergy program commenced in 2003.

Thanks to a RHH Research Foundation research grant in 2014, medical researcher Dr Bruce Lyons from the School of Medicine at the University of Tasmania, is taking Jack Jumper research to a much-needed next stage by carefully studying why not all patients respond to clinical treatment. Dr Lyons is also looking to formulate a way of predicting the success of individual patients in the program. This exciting research is a huge step forward for the long term program particularly when it is acknowledged that prior to research into this area, patients were unable to receive any assistance with their Jack Jumper allergy.

It is critical for the health and well-being of many Tasmanians that Jack Jumper research continues. To illustrate the importance of this, you need only to look across the Bass Strait where over 400 passionate Victorians are lobbying state government to have access to a similar desensitisation program to the one offered to Tasmanians.

Media invitation:

11am Thursday 4 December 2014

Heather Francis CEO RHH Research Foundation and Dr Bruce Lyons
Ground Floor, 25 Argyle St Hobart

For more info: CEO Heather Francis phone 0407 201 113

11am Saturday 6 December 2014

Marcus Allan (father) and Hamish Allan (Jack Jumper program patient)
At their home in Kingston (please phone Cath for home address)

For more info: Cath Adams phone 0418 101 738

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