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MEDIA RELEASE

NHMRC EXCELLENCE AWARDS DEMONSTRATE AUSTRALIA'S STRENGTH IN HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH

The calibre and depth of health and medical research in Australia was demonstrated last night at the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) Excellence Awards in Canberra. Australia's peak body for health and medical research presented the awards to recognise the scientific merit, innovation and the research success of 10 of Australia's leading health and medical researchers.

"The NHMRC established these Excellence Awards to recognise and reward achievement in the highly competitive health and medical research field," Professor Warwick Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of the NHMRC said.

"These award winners are outstanding researchers. As the highest ranking applicants in their funding schemes, these 10 researchers have been assessed by their peers as meeting the highest national and international standards for their research.

"They have been identified as the top 10 of the nearly 5,000 researchers that applied for NHMRC funding in 2010. They are the top ten researchers in the 24% of applicants that were successful in receiving NHMRC funding.

Professor Michael Good, Chair of the NHMRC Council said that it is important that their achievements are recognised by all Australians, who will benefit from the results of this research.

"Australia will have, through the ongoing contribution of these world-class researchers, a self-improving health system. That is why the NHMRC continues to recognise the best and brightest researchers through our Excellence Awards.

"We want to ensure that Australia's health and medical research workforce continues to conduct high quality, ethical research that can respond to our health needs in the 21st century," he said.

The research areas of these distinguished researchers includes: facilitating a multi-disciplinary approach to caring for Indigenous cancer patients, new strategies to treat autoimmune diseases and the treatment and understanding of chronic pain.

We congratulate all recipients on these awards.

A profile of NHMRC Excellence Award recipients is attached.

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NHMRC Achievement Award for Highest Ranked Project Grant

Professor Jürgen Götz, University of Sydney, New South Wales

Professor Jürgen Götz had worked in Germany, the US and Switzerland, before being recruited to the Brain & Mind Research Institute of the University of Sydney in 2005. His major interest is in developing transgenic animal models to understand pathogenic mechanisms in Alzheimer's disease and use these to develop therapies.

NHMRC Achievement Award for Top Ranked NHMRC Research Fellow

Professor Paul Hodges, University of Queensland

Professor Paul Hodges is Director of the NHMRC Centre for Clinical Research Excellence in Spinal Pain, Injury and Health. He has doctorates in physiotherapy and neuroscience and uses this mix of skills to bridge between basic neurophysiological and clinical research. His work aims to understand mechanisms underpinning chronic pain and to develop conservative treatments.

NHMRC Achievement Award for Top Ranked Practitioner Fellow

Professor Guy Marks, University of Sydney, New South Wales

Professor Guy Marks leads the Respiratory and Environmental Epidemiology group at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and is a respiratory physician at Liverpool Hospital in Sydney. His research uses diverse epidemiological tools to understand, monitor and evaluate interventions relevant to major local and global lung health problems, in particular, chronic respiratory disease and tuberculosis.

NHMRC Achievement Awards for Career Development

CDA2 - Biomedical

Dr Tania de Koning-Ward, Deakin University, Victoria

Dr Tania de Koning-Ward established her own research group in 2007, within the School of Medicine at Deakin University as the School was preparing to accept its first intake of medical students. Her research is centred on the molecular basis of malaria pathogenesis, particularly how this deadly pathogen is able to remodel its host red blood cell to enhance its survival and cause disease.

CDA2 - Population Health

Associate Professor Wendy Oddy, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Western Australia

Associate Professor Oddy has a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition, an MPH and a PhD in epidemiology. Associate Professor Oddy's project investigating nutrition and child development was selected as one of 'Ten of the Best' in 2006. To date, Associate Professor Oddy has over 90 publications and is on the Review Board of 16 scientific journals.

CDA1 - Clinical

Dr Michael Valenzuela, University of New South Wales

Dr Michael Valenzuela is a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Psychiatry, and leader of the Regenerative Neuroscience Group UNSW. His research aims at understanding the competing forces of degeneration and neuroplasticity in the human brain, and ranges across studies of stem cells, animal models, neuroimaging, pathology, clinical trials and epidemiology.

CDA1 - Population Health

Dr Patricia Valery, Queensland Institute of Medical Research

Dr Patricia Valery worked as a Paediatrician prior to gaining her PhD. She has been working in Indigenous Health Research for the last 11 years. Her current work focuses on two critical health needs for Indigenous Australians, namely cancer and infectious diseases. Her work in cancer will inform service provision on how to best facilitate a multidisciplinary supportive care approach for Indigenous cancer patients. It will also evaluate an antibiotic in treating infectious diseases in Indigenous children. These findings may guide the medical management of such patients.

CDA1 - Industry

Dr Tony Velkov, Deakin University, Victoria

Dr Tony Velkov trained in medical microbiology and bioinformatics during his PhD. His investigations into the way in which orally absorbed drugs are taken up across the small intestine has implications for the design of new drugs. This has the potential to maximize oral absorption by enhancing interactions with proteins through targeted structural modifications. This has now been accepted as a new trans-cytosolic drug transport mechanism in the pharmaceutical sciences community.

CDA2 - Clinical

Dr Grant Waterer, University of Western Australia

Dr Grant Waterer is Professor of Medicine at the University of Western Australia, adjunct A/Professor of Medicine at Northwestern University, Chicago and a consultant respiratory physician at Royal Perth Hospital. His primary research interest is in pulmonary infectious diseases and especially pneumonia, from both immunological and microbiological perspectives.

CDA1 - Biomedical

Dr Di Yu, Monash University, Victoria

Dr Di Yu is the head of laboratory for molecular immunomodulation in Monash University. His research team investigates the molecular mechanisms of immune responses with the focus to design new strategies to modulate the immune system to treat autoimmune diseases and cancer. He received his PhD from ANU in 2007 and was selected as Monash Fellow in 2010.