



**Cancer Society New Zealand
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa**

National Office
Level 2, Red Cross House
69 Molesworth Street, Thorndon
PO Box 12700
Wellington 6011

Telephone: 64 4 494-7270
Facsimile: 64 4 494-7271

Websites: www.cancernz.org.nz
www.daffodilday.org.nz
www.relayforlife.org.nz
Email: admin@cancer.org.nz

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 10 June, 2009

Cancer Society of New Zealand announces 2009 scientific research grants

The Cancer Society of New Zealand has announced its 2009 scientific grants, with this year's recipients representing a wide range of research projects. They include:

- New Zealand participation in a major international study to determine the optimal treatment of pancreatic cancer
- the development of an anti cancer agent from a bacterial product manufactured from a marine sponge found in the Pelorus Sound
- using zebra-fish to help identify a cause of childhood leukaemia
- exploring the potential for a new and positive use for a drug similar to Thalidomide

Russell McIlroy, President of the society, was pleased with the calibre and number of applicants. "We received 35 applications from most of the country's leading medical research institutions, so choosing the successful projects was extremely challenging."

The nine new research grants take the total number of projects currently receiving Cancer Society funding to 30, worth in excess of \$4,300,000.

In addition, the Cancer Society directly funds another \$2.5 million of cancer research through its Auckland-based cancer research centre and provides \$300,000 annually to support the work of the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit at Otago University. The Christchurch-based Cancer Society Tissue Bank is supported by the Canterbury/West Coast Division - with a grant to cover operating costs as well as a \$1.3 million trust to ensure the future of this unique research facility.

"The Cancer Society is the largest funder of cancer research in New Zealand outside of government," added Mr McIlroy. "We are extremely conscious of the importance of these funds to ensure that critical research continues in New Zealand, especially in the current economic environment."

The Minister of Health Tony Ryall praised the Cancer Society for its long-term commitment to cancer research. "The Cancer Society's commitment recognises the vital importance of on-going research in cancer care, and we fully support this."

The applications were evaluated by a panel of Australasia's leading cancer specialists, chaired

by Professor Brett Delahunt, of the Wellington School of Medicine.

The society has used proceeds from last year's Movember campaign towards a study on improving the health and quality of life for prostate cancer patients through programmed physical activity, and provided further support for an ongoing study into the use of hormone therapy in the treatment of prostate cancer.

The full list of 2009 grant recipients is:

- **Dr Maria Pearse and Professor Michael Findlay**

Department of Radiation and Medical Oncology, Auckland City Hospital.

To determine the optimal treatment for patients with locally advanced pancreatic cancer.

Pancreas cancer is the fifth most common cause of death in women and sixth in men. This grant round approved \$90,392 over three years to facilitate accrual of New Zealand patients into an international randomised clinical trial to find the best treatment in this cancer.

- **Professor John Miller and Dr Anne La Flamme**

School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington.

Developing peloruside as an anticancer agent.

Peloruside is a bacterial product manufactured from a marine sponge growing in Pelorus Sound. This Grant round approved \$200,000 over two years to further refine the product so it can be used in **clinical trials, probably first in lung cancer. It clearly has a uniquely Kiwi flavour.**

- **Dr Justin Keogh and Dr Daniel Shepherd**

School of Sport and Recreation, AUT University, Auckland.

To improve the health and quality of life of prostate cancer patients on androgen deprivation therapy by programmed physical activity.

Money from this Grant round will be used by the investigator to explore how to best get men with prostate cancer into exercise programmes and how they may stay in it. Men on hormone treatment for prostate cancer lose some strength and exercise may reverse this.

- **Associate Professor Christine Morris and Dr Ursula Jewell**

Cancer Genetics Research Group, University of Otago, Christchurch.

To continue the group's examination of molecular and genetic changes associated with leukaemia and their potential significances by using modern DNA profiling technology

This year's Grant round continues to support the salary and some expenses of Professor Morris' long standing work investigating the molecular and genetic changes associated with leukaemia. The CSNZ and the Canterbury/West Coast Division of CSNZ have supported this group's research for many years and have committed \$200,000 over two years.

- **Associate Professor Lai Ming Ching and Assoc Professor Brian Palmer**

Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, Auckland.

To support thalidomide-like compounds in the treatment of myeloma that may be less toxic and as effective as thalidomide.

This established and productive group was granted \$130,000 to aid the further development of a group of thalidomide like compounds discovered in the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, Auckland. In the 1950s thalidomide taken by mothers during pregnancy caused damage to the blood supply of growing limbs. More recently thalidomide has been helpful in the treatment of Multiple myeloma. These new compounds may be less toxic and more effective than thalidomide.

- **Dr Ryuji Fukuzawa and Professor Tony Reeve**

Cancer Genetics Laboratory, Biochemistry Department, University of Otago, Dunedin.

To support investigation of the role of WTX mutations and the development of Wilms Tumours.

The CSNZ will contribute \$50,000 towards research investigating why an identical genetic mutation can in some patients cause a cancer of the kidney in children (Wilms Tumours) but in others a bone abnormality which is not a cancer. Investigating when the timing of the mutation occurs could lead to a therapeutic treatment of this childhood cancer.

- **Professor Franca Ronchese and Dr Pisana Rawson**

Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Wellington.

To identify markers in T cells that can be used to distinguish between those that do provide good anti-tumour rejections, from those that do not, that may guide vaccination strategies.

A better understanding on how markers on T cells predict for anti-cancer treatment and could be used ultimately in an anti-cancer vaccine is a long held dream of this prolific research team at the Malaghan Institute. Their work will be facilitated by a grant of \$120,000 in 2009.

- **Dr Bridget Stocker and Dr Mattie Timmer**

Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Wellington.

To research the use of glycolipids in prompting immune responses against cancers.

This group, also from the Malaghan Institute is looking at a different way of prompting an immune fight against cancers. They are researching how novel glycolipids strengthen anti T-cell responses. The CSNZ will support the project to the tune of \$240,000 over two years.

- **Professor Ian Morison and Robert Weeks**

Department of Pathology, Dunedin School of Medicine, Dunedin.

Research in TES (the gene for Testin) and its role in the development of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (childhood ALL).

The Otago & Southland Division of CSNZ will support this group's research into a compound called testin which may have a role in the cause of childhood ALL. The work uses a fascinating model - the zebrafish - which has much of the genomic structure of humans. The work will be supported by a grant of \$150,000 over two years.

In addition to the research grants, the Cancer Society has also announced four new training scholarships. The scholarships allow students to undertake advanced research in the field of cancer, leading to a Doctorate in Philosophy from a New Zealand University.

Scholarship recipients for 2009 are:

- Ms Antionette Lee (Auckland University).
Project to develop a monoclonal antibody targeted against human growth hormone that has been found in endometrial and breast cancer.
- Ms Virginia Ip (Auckland University).
Project to study copper efflux transporters in dorsal root ganglion and its role in platinum induced neuropathy.
- Ms Roseanne Rosario (Auckland University).
Investigation of the underlying genetic alterations involved in the development and progression of granulosa cell tumours (ovarian cancer).
- Ms Lynley Wicks (Victoria University of Wellington).
To investigate whether surviving cancer is associated with a change in quality of life in young adults treated for cancer as adolescents and to investigate targeted interventions.

- ENDS -

For more information, contact:

Russell McIlroy (MB, ChB, FRCS, FRACS),
President, Cancer Society of New Zealand
Mobile: 021 969 239
Email: RMcIlroy@adhb.govt.nz

Dalton Kelly
Chief Executive, Cancer Society of NZ
Direct line: 04 494 7273
Mobile: 027 231 0067
Email: dalton.kelly@cancer.org.nz

Background information

Russell McIlroy, M.B., Ch.B, FRCS, FRACS
President, Cancer Society of New Zealand

- Consultant Urologist Auckland City Hospital since 1972
- Past President Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand
- Examiner in Urology for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons for 10 years
- Past President of the Auckland Medico Legal Society
- Served on the Executive of the Auckland Division of the Cancer Society of New Zealand for 21 years, the last 6 as President
- Member of the Board of the Cancer Society of New Zealand for 10 years President for the last 3 years