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Medical
Research Trust

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



New test to tackle rapid emergence of antibiotic resistance

A Tasmanian research project, facilitated by Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust, has delivered ground-breaking results that will benefit millions of people worldwide.

During Medical Research Week (June 3-7), the success of Chief Investigator Dr Stephen Tristram, from the University of Tasmania, and his PhD student and Associate Investigator, Elizabeth Witherden, is being celebrated by the Trust

Dr Tristram and Miss Witherden have investigated the rapid emergence of antibiotic resistance in *Haemophilus Influenzae* – a bacterial pathogen that is frequently involved in respiratory infections - such as pneumonia and middle ear infections.

Antibiotic resistance has been declared by the World Health Organisation as one of the three biggest global threats to human health.

The pair has published a new molecular test – set to be implemented internationally - that accurately detects the resistance.

It will prove a handy tool, given that approximately 30 per cent of strains of *H. Influenzae* are resistant to the three most commonly prescribed antibiotics for respiratory tract infections.

“The problem with antibiotic resistance is that it is sometimes difficult to detect and patients end up receiving an antibiotic that doesn’t work as well as an alternative, or in the worst case, doesn’t work at all,” Dr Tristram said.

“We hope that our findings will help laboratories be able to more easily detect antibiotic resistance and better guide prescribing by doctors.

“This is significant because there are about 20 million prescriptions for antibiotics every year in Australia, many of which are prescribed for respiratory tract infections.”

Dr Tristram and Miss Witherden have had three publications as a result of their research with a fourth planned. They also presented their results at the European Congress for Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases in London in 2012.

Miss Witherden is also celebrating some personal success after the Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) ran a postgraduate research student award to showcase Tasmanian research.

Of 20 abstracts submitted, the School of Human Life Sciences student was named the winner and the 2013 ASMR postgraduate research student award medallist.

“I have been involved in this research project since 2010 and although there have been some difficult and frustrating times, I have been encouraged by little discoveries along the way that make me feel that I am contributing to this important field,” she said.

The Dean of UTAS’ Faculty of Health Science, Professor Denise Fassett, said this research project was a wonderful example of collaboration between two institutions with different focuses but a common vision – that of delivering better health outcomes. “The Trust is a locally focussed, locally administered institution; UTAS strives to serve the whole state and at the same time produce world-class research. Together we have achieved something of international import.”

Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust Chief Executive Peter Milne said the Trust was proud to have funded Miss Witherden’s PhD work and had also contributed to Dr Tristram’s ground-breaking work since 2001.

“Their work, funded through the generous donations of the wonderful contributors to the Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust, is significant and will have a positive impact on patients around the world,” he said.

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