



# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

DATE: TUESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2007

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **\$12 million grant package a major boost to Menzies research**

The Menzies Research Institute at the University of Tasmania was today awarded almost \$12 million in research grants by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

In a first for UTAS, the funding includes \$8.1 million for a prestigious program grant that will help researchers better understand diseases like prostate cancer, leukaemia, MS, malaria and epilepsy.

The multi-disciplinary program includes research between genetics, bioinformatics, ethics, law and clinicians, and involves multiple institutions including Menzies, the UTAS Faculty of Law, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

Additionally, nine project grants were awarded a total of almost \$4 million in funds, while Associate Professor Steve Rattigan received a \$537,500 NHMRC Research Fellowship to continue his work with insulin and its impact on hypertension, diabetes and obesity.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Daryl Le Grew said the funding allocation was a tribute to the magnificent work of the Menzies Research Institute team under the leadership of Professor Simon Foote.

“Bringing the Menzies Research Institute and Faculty of Health Science together has led to impressive synergies that lift the medical research effort and reputation in Tasmania. Added to this, we have a wonderful partnership between the Menzies and the Law School with this new Program Grant,” he said.

“The Menzies enjoys the excellent support and advice of an experienced, dedicated Board, led by its Chair, Dr Dan Norton and continues to build its reputation as one of the leading medical research institutions in the country.”

Professor Foote said Menzies had performed exceptionally well in the funding round, with the outcome testament to the growing stature of its research.

“Congratulations must go to all those involved. This is an exceptional outcome and we look forward to moving these exciting projects forward,” he said.

A total of \$561.4 million in NHMRC funds was announced by the Federal Government this morning.

## **FURTHER DETAIL:**

### **Program Grants:**

Professor Simon Foote, \$8,134,805

'Genetic and bioinformatic analysis of complex human diseases'

Some human diseases are common in families; examples include prostate cancer, blood cancers, epilepsy and diabetes. Close relatives of individuals with a disease have an increased risk of being affected by this disease, implying a genetic basis. Finding the cause of these diseases is difficult. We have a novel approach to the identification of genes responsible for these diseases. Identifying these genes will increase understanding of how the body program goes off course, giving rise to disease.

### **Project Grants (sample):**

**Dr Chang-Hai Ding**, \$292,925

'Can childhood physical activity and fatness affect the potential to develop knee osteoarthritis?'

Interventions to increase participation of physical activity (PA) and to reduce obesity in childhood are advocated to reduce the risks of cardiovascular and other diseases in adulthood, but the associations of childhood PA and obesity with knee osteoarthritic changes in adulthood are unknown. This study, with follow-up of a large cohort of Australian children over 20 years, will be the first to determine these associations using the powerful technique of magnetic resonance imaging.

**Dr Kristy Sanderson**, \$133,438

'Depression and anxiety in working adults: the costs and the outcomes of working while ill'

Depressive and anxiety disorders are common in the working population and costly. Individuals can continue working while ill or take an absence from work. This study will evaluate the economic cost and health outcomes of these two scenarios, using existing and published data to develop descriptive models. We consider "who pays" and "who benefits" from the perspective of the individual, their employer and society, to inform policy making, management practices, and clinical care.

**Dr Richard Wood-Baker**, \$375,375

'Managing Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease in the Community'

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the third leading cause of ‘burden of disease’ in Australia. It has a major impact on sufferers, their carers and society. This study introduces a new model of community care, based on case management, mentoring to improve self-efficacy and information systems to deliver information and closely monitor disease status. This will improve the quality of life of sufferers, develop healthcare networks and decrease healthcare utilisation.

**For further comment and interviews:**

UTAS Vice-Chancellor Professor Daryl Le Grew: (03) 6226 2002

Menzies Institute Director Professor Simon Foote will be available for comment between 12 noon and 1.15pm today on 0407 855 438

NHMRC Research Fellow Associate Professor Steve Rattigan is available until 2.30pm today on (03) 6226 2671.

Dr Kristy Sanderson can talk about her project grant on (03) 6226 4724.

\* Menzies Institute media inquiries: Lucinda Bray, Beyond PR, 0438 280 486

**Information Released by:**

**The Media Office, University of Tasmania**

**Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291**

**Email: [Media.Office@utas.edu.au](mailto:Media.Office@utas.edu.au)**