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Brennen Trust helps medical research in Victoria

Following the distribution of \$96,500 to a number of grant recipients earlier in the year, The Harold & Cora Brennen Benevolent Trust has distributed a further \$69,500 in funding to the Burnet Institute and St. Vincent's Hospital Melbourne to purchase specialised medical research equipment to assist in ongoing research projects.

The Burnet Institute will receive \$40,000 to purchase a 'super resolution microscope' to assist vaccine development by allowing scientists to capture images of human cells and infectious microbes in unprecedented detail. These organisms are too small to be properly observed using existing microscopes.

St. Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has been given \$29,500 for the purchase of a 'live-cell fluorescence-imaging microscope', which will be used for several research projects at the hospital. One project includes research into bio-robotics for cancer and trauma patients, who have had to have amputations as part of their treatment. The microscope will enable researchers to work with live cells and tissues to assess how disease develops and whether drug treatments are being delivered.

See attached backgrounder for more information on the research projects.

Harold Brennen established the Trust through his will in 1996, to support the purchase of equipment and instruments for the purposes of medical research into all aspects of medicine and surgery. The Trust, which is administered by Equity Trustees Limited and its co-trustees, Peter James and Dr Robert James has granted over \$1.5 million through 67 grants to medical institutions since its establishment.

Tabitha Lovett, head of philanthropy at Equity Trustees, says that the Brennen Trust is a good example of how trusts can be set up to support, in perpetuity, particular causes or areas such as medical research.

"The Brennen Trust was set up specifically to provide grants to medical institutions in Victoria to purchase equipment to assist in their research and, as administrators of the Trust, our responsibility is to ensure the Brennens' philanthropic vision is realised

"The funding provided by the Trust over the last 16 years has meant a number of Victorian medical institutions have been able to advance their research goals. This has led to the development of significant treatments for medical conditions that affect many Australians such as skin cancers, diabetes, Parkinson's disease and epilepsy," she said.

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For more information please contact:

Tabitha Lovett

Phone: 03 8623 5379

Email: tlovett@eqt.com.au

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Burnet Institute

About the institute

Burnet is an Australian, not-for-profit, unaligned and independent organisation that links medical research with public health action, recognising that solutions to many of the major global health problems require comprehensive and innovative responses. These include novel discoveries, such as the development of new vaccines and diagnostic tests, and the better use of existing best-practice health interventions.

About the research project

The high-definition images generated by super resolution microscope will significantly improve the researchers' capacity to understand how microbes undermine the immune system and how immune cells recognise and destroy cancer cells.

Understanding the immune system is critical to accelerating the development of vaccines against, for instance, malaria, HIV/AIDS, influenza as well as cancers such as ovarian cancer, breast cancer and lymphoma.

"The super-resolution microscope will enable scientists like me to understand for the very first time how cancer antigens are processed in dendritic cell and how they stimulate T-cells to recognise and kill cancers," Burnet's head of bio-organic and medicinal chemistry, Professor Geoff Pietersz, said.

"With the support of the Harold and Cora Brennen Benevolent Trust, the Burnet Institute is able to purchase state-of-the-art equipment that is essential to rapidly advance understanding of major human health problems.

"This understanding is necessary to find solutions to these diseases," director and CEO of the Burnet Institute, Professor Brendan Crabb, said.

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For more information please contact:

Catherine Somerville

Media and communications officer, Burnet Institute

Phone: 03 8506 2404

Email: cathersomerville@burnet.edu.au

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Vincent's Hospital

About the hospital

St Vincent's provides acute medical and surgical services, emergency and critical care, aged care, diagnostics, rehabilitation, allied health, mental health, palliative care and residential care, as well as undertaking research and educating the next generation of healthcare professionals.

About the project

Professor Peter Choong, head of the University of Melbourne's Department of Surgery at St Vincent's Hospital, said that one area of research where the Brennen Trust's funding will be critical is bio-robotics.

"Our team is looking at ways to combine cell biology with smart metals and polymers to rebuild and reengineer new limbs or parts of limbs for patients who have had to have amputations, for instance due to cancer.

"This work involves studying how normal tissues grow into and react with artificial materials e.g. prosthesis; looking at what drives cells to develop as specific types of tissues and how these processes can be controlled; and understanding how stem cells can be used and controlled to create artificial structures to replace body parts.

"Analysing how these cells perform requires very special imaging that is not readily available. Such sophisticated imaging systems are expensive but thanks to the Brennen Trust, we can now purchase a live-imaging microscope that will increase our chance of taking our research from the laboratory bench to the patient's bedside," Professor Choong said.

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For more information please contact:

Bruce Atherton
Media manager, St Vincent's
Phone: 03 9288 2262
Email: bruce.atherton@svhm.org.au