

MEDIA RELEASE

May 16 2005

Prime Minister opens ACRF Unit for Molecular Genetics of Cancer at Garvan Institute of Medical Research

New equipment reduces eight months of cancer research to one day!

The Hon John Howard MP, Prime Minister of Australia, officially opened the Australian Cancer Research Fund (ACRF) Unit for Molecular Genetics of Cancer at Garvan Institute of Medical Research, Sydney, on Monday, May 16 2005.

The world-class facility was established using the \$1.1 million ACRF grant awarded last year. Grant funds were directed towards the purchase of major research equipment including the Mass Array Sequenom analyser, which can test up to 768 DNA samples at once, effectively enabling eight months of cancer research to be completed in one day.

Mr Howard's presence at the proceedings followed the Australian Government's 2005-06 budget pledge of \$196 million over five years for the Strengthening Cancer Care initiative, including funding for additional research, screening and prevention strategies.

ACRF Chairman Mr Tom Dery praised the Government's ongoing commitment to cancer research and the efforts of the dedicated research team at Garvan Institute, headed by Professor Rob Sutherland, FAA. "This is a remarkable leap forward," said Mr Dery. "It is this kind of innovation - in capital works and infrastructure - that the Australian Cancer Research Foundation is committed to funding."

"The last few years have seen major strides forward in cancer therapy. However, as our population ages, cancer is becoming an ever-more prevalent problem. ACRF grants ensure that Australia will continue to draw the best and brightest minds to this major problem of mankind, and also retain its place as a world-class leader in the field. Ultimately, this means real benefits to cancer patients."

Mr Dery noted that the annual cost of treating cancer in Australia was more than \$2 billion, and that every dollar spent on medical research returned \$5 in national economic benefit. "A reduction in cancer in the community by just 20 per cent would be worth \$184 billion to the national economy - more than the total Commonwealth expenditure in the current financial year," he said.

Professor John Shine, AO FAA, Executive Director, Garvan Institute said the ACRF Unit's aim was to provide an additional capability in the search for cancer susceptibility genes.

"Our research focus has been on the development of a world class facility to genotype cancer, identifying patients with a predisposition to a variety of cancers including prostate, colorectal, breast and ovarian," said Professor Shine.

Professor Sutherland said the establishment of the state-of-the-art ACRF Unit provided the capacity to carry out internationally competitive research in cancer genetics, as well as an additional platform to attract the best researchers and students in NSW and Australia.

"We can expect to see the development of new gene markers of cancer risk, cancer diagnosis, disease progression and therapeutic responsiveness," said Professor Sutherland. "What this means for cancer patients is earlier diagnosis, targeted prevention and treatment and better outcomes following a cancer diagnosis."

Until now the facility had only been used by researchers from Garvan and St Vincent's, however a recent infrastructure grant from the Cancer Institute of NSW has enabled the appointment of a unit manager and research assistant, making the facility accessible to cancer researchers throughout NSW and nationally if requested.

Now in its 21st year of operation, the Australian Cancer Research Foundation has raised in excess of \$36 million to support excellence in Australian research initiatives, and has awarded grants totaling \$6.3 million in just the last two years. Individual ACRF grants exceed \$1 million - a sum not available from other private sources in Australia - and continue to significantly contribute to breakthroughs in the fight against cancer.

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