

MEDIA RELEASE

New Fellowship Strengthens Garvan Potential to find a cure for Type 2 diabetes

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The Garvan Institute of Medical Research today announced the establishment of the GlaxoSmithKline Don Chisholm Fellowship for Diabetes Research – a position dedicated to vital research into the causes, processes and treatments for Type 2 diabetes, one of Australia’s most common and serious diseases.

Garvan’s outstanding team of diabetes researchers and clinical experts regularly contribute important new insights about the underlying causes and development of the disease. These insights each have the potential to help address the growing problem of Type 2 diabetes, which affects more and more people worldwide.

In Australia alone, nearly one million people are affected, with 55,000 more being diagnosed each year,¹ a number predicted to rise progressively over the next decade. Diabetes is linked to a number of serious complications including kidney failure, amputations, blindness and heart disease.

Professor Don Chisholm AO has had a long and distinguished career in diabetes medicine and research, marked by a series of seminal breakthroughs in his field. Head of Garvan’s diabetes program for over 20 years, until stepping aside in 2001, Professor Chisholm has noted the impact of lifestyle changes on Australians, “Rates of obesity are soaring in Australia leaving us not far behind America as the fattest nation. Obesity is directly linked with the development of diabetes, which is one of five national priority health concerns for the Australian Government.”

“While our knowledge has expanded significantly in recent years, we do not yet fully understand how and why Type 2 diabetes develops. We are making promising progress in analysing the disease from a number of perspectives, expanding our knowledge both at the cellular level and through human clinical studies.”

People with Type 2 diabetes do not produce enough insulin, a hormone which converts sugar to energy, or cannot use it effectively within the body, a phenomenon known as insulin resistance. Without insulin, sugar levels in the blood become dangerously high, leading to organ damage and other serious complications. Almost 12,000 deaths in Australia are associated with Type 2 diabetes every year.²

Professor Chisholm believes there is some complacency among Australians about diabetes, with many underestimating its potentially damaging effects, “There is a lack of awareness of the seriousness of the disease, with complications including blindness, disability, kidney failure, heart disease and death.”

“Professor Don Chisholm is one of the most highly respected diabetes and obesity researchers in the world, and it is no surprise that Garvan has recognised his contribution in the naming of this Fellowship,” said Professor David James, Director of Garvan’s Diabetes & Obesity Research Program.

“The addition of the dedicated Fellowship will reinforce Garvan’s leadership of diabetes research in Australia and internationally. The Fellowship will focus on learning more about why Type 2 diabetes develops in humans, how it interacts with other conditions and why abdominal fat is instrumental in causing insulin resistance - of particular interest to Garvan, given Australia’s obesity epidemic.”

“We are all intent on uncovering truths about diabetes that will translate into better clinical outcomes for patients. The GSK Don Chisholm Fellowship will drive our push to take research from the laboratory to the bedside as quickly as possible.”

The Fellowship is being funded for two years by pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline as part of its commitment to diabetes research, prevention and cure. A separate contribution is being made by the company to support the establishment of the Don Chisholm Chair in diabetes research. Garvan is currently seeking additional financial support for this position.

Media Enquiries

For more information on the GlaxoSmithKline Don Chisholm Research Fellowship, please contact Kris Matta-Noaman on 0409 481 469 or Leon Beswick on 0414 332 267.

About Garvan’s diabetes research

The Garvan Institute of Medical Research has made major contributions to scientific knowledge about diabetes over the last 44 years. These findings have led to major improvements in clinical care, such as the first low-dose insulin infusion technique which reduced mortality from 12% to 2% in patients with Type 1 diabetes experiencing diabetic comas. Recently, Garvan’s clinical research has focused on the effect of diet on diabetes, the role of abdominal fat in diabetes and the use of treatments which control blood sugar and improve the body’s response to insulin. This complements a major basic research program related to the study of insulin secretion from the islet cells of the pancreas and the molecular mechanisms of insulin action on body tissues.

About Garvan

The Garvan Institute of Medical Research was founded in 1963. Initially a research department of St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, it is now one of Australia's largest medical research institutions with approximately 400 scientists, students and support staff. Garvan's main research programs are: Cancer, Diabetes & Obesity, Arthritis & Immunology, Osteoporosis, and Neuroscience. The Garvan's mission is to make significant contributions to medical science that will change the directions of science and medicine and have major impacts on human health. The outcome of Garvan's discoveries is the development of better methods of diagnosis, treatment, and ultimately, prevention of disease.

References

1. The Differences Between Type 1 & Type 2 Diabetes. Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation 2006.
2. Australia's Health 2006 – The tenth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare. AIHW 2006.