Making NEWS

Droplet lens turns smart phones into microscopes
Australian scientists have invented a simple and cheap way of making a high-powered lens that can transform a smartphone into a high-resolution microscope. The lens promises a revolution in science and medicine in developing countries and remote areas. Garvan’s Dr Tri Phan collaborated with the inventor of the lens manufacturing technology, Dr Steve Lee from the Australian National University (ANU). They discovered that the lens can reach a magnifying power of up to 160 times, with an imaging resolution of four micrometers.

Slowing the immune system when in overdrive
Garvan scientists believe that a molecule known as Interleukin 21 (IL-21) is a promising therapeutic target in cases of chronic inflammation where the immune system overreacts to ‘self’ tissue. IL-21 is one of a group of chemical messengers known as ‘cytokines’, which affect the behaviour of immune cells, and it is already known to play an important role in autoimmune diseases such as Sjögren’s syndrome and Type 1 diabetes. This study shows how much IL-21 contributes to inflammation, and how important it is to remove IL-21 to reduce inflammation, even where there are other severe immune defects present.

Garvan led team wins prestigious prostate cancer award
An international team, led by Garvan’s Professor Peter Croucher has received one of two 2014 Movember Revolutionary Team Awards from the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia. The Garvan-led team will be investigating the spread of prostate cancer cells to the skeleton, one of the most devastating consequences of advanced prostate cancer. They hope to understand the conditions within the bone microenvironment that trigger activation, and to find ways of delaying or preventing activation.

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From the CEO

With the new financial year upon us, I would like to take the opportunity to remind all Australians that philanthropy and fundraising are vital to ensure the future of medical research.

The simple fact is that, for every dollar Garvan researchers receive in Government funding, we still need to raise another 70 cents in order to sustain research projects.

Some of the most cutting-edge research to come out of Garvan in the past ten years has only been made possible by philanthropic and individual donations. If donations stopped coming through today, a lot of our researchers would have to pack their bags and abandon some of their most promising work.

It is thanks to the incredible support of our donors that we have been able to sustain research for cancer, immunology, neuroscience, bone biology, diabetes and metabolism.

Philanthropic support not only alleviates some of the financial stress on research teams, it also encourages innovation. It is vital for funding “novel projects” – that is, a promising project in its very early stages that does not yet have enough basic data behind it to be eligible for Government funding.

Donations are also crucial for the purchase of equipment and technology that is essential to modern day medical research, but not generally eligible for Government funding.

A donation of $10 can help purchase vital equipment and provide our gifted researchers with the means to continue using innovative approaches to achieve life-changing breakthroughs.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and for helping Garvan’s world-class researchers to continue making important breakthroughs that have the potential to improve diagnosis, treatment and patient outcomes for some of the major diseases impacting human health.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Giles
Garvan Research Foundation


We are saddened to report that Dr Lee MacCormick Edwards, a passionate supporter of Garvan’s Ovarian Cancer Research Program, passed away recently in Sydney.

Lee’s generosity knew no bounds and her support of Garvan’s research was both personal and public. Her impassioned advocacy saw her speak most eloquently of her own experience with ovarian cancer at Garvan’s 2013 Ovarian Cancer Awareness Day Leaders Lunch and we were privileged to have her attendance again in 2014 despite failing health. Lee, alongside her close friend, Margaret Rose, provided powerful voice to a disease that is otherwise little understood.

During her fascinating life, Lee divided her time between America and Australia, and in both countries made significant contributions to the cultural and artistic arenas. She was a respected lecturer in art history, and author.

Lee married in 1959, and had a daughter, Alison. However, the marriage ended in 1976. In 1989, Lee met Michael Crane, a Scottish-born artist and they married in 2013.

Michael and Lee shared a passion for the Salzburg Festival, which they attended for 30 years. In 2005, Lee was awarded the Goldene Kreuz of the state of Salzburg for her work as head of the American Friends of the Festival.

Lee also became an accomplished photographer, exhibiting annually. Although much of her life was lived in America, her heart was always in Australia. Her last photographic exhibition in America was entitled My World, and featured her native Australia. Lee’s last Australian exhibition, held in 2013 and entitled Capturing the Moment, raised vital funds for Garvan’s ovarian cancer research and the St Vincent’s Curran Foundation.

Lee MacCormick Edwards spent her last year in Sydney, with the love and support of her husband Michael, and regular visits from her much adored daughter, Alison.

Lee will be remembered for her vibrancy, her generosity of spirit and her ferocious appetite for life.

The future of medical research is in good hands

Rick Stevens has spent more than 45 years educating a generation of Australians. Now, as a Garvan Partner for the Future, he is leaving a legacy for future generations.

A semi-retired educator and educational author, Rick Stevens is a busy man. He remains active in a number of professional organisations, chairs the Council of a Sydney Anglican school, supervises student teachers and volunteers as a maths and religious teacher. To say he is passionate about education is an understatement.

Mr Stevens first became acquainted with Garvan’s work through an association with the late Professor Rob Sutherland’s family (head of Garvan’s Cancer Program for 27 years, and inaugural Director of The Kinghorn Cancer Centre). The more he learnt about Garvan’s work and breakthroughs, the more he wanted to contribute. So, Rick decided to start making an annual donation.

He said, “I was impressed by the way Garvan kept donors informed about its research and discoveries. I also found the seminars to be very informative. It particularly attracted the way Garvan scientists can speak about their highly complex research, but make it simple and easy to understand.”

When the time came for Rick to review his will, he decided to leave a bequest to four charities, of which Garvan is one. Since then he has been impressed by the way Garvan embraces its Partners for the Future (those who have left a lasting legacy to medical research by including a bequest in their will), going above and beyond to show gratitude and keep them informed.

Due to experiences of family, friends and even some of his students, Mr Stevens has an interest in a number of the disease areas researched at Garvan: from cancer, Type 2 diabetes and obesity, to osteoporosis, arthritis, and dementia. Rick is pleased to be playing a role in helping to unlock the secrets to these devastating diseases.

Mr Stevens said, “Every time I visit Garvan, I am reminded of what an amazing place it is. What really strikes me is the age range of the scientists. From those who have recently graduated through to world-class senior scientists like Professor John Shine. It is encouraging to know that the future of medical research will be in good hands, and that I am playing a small part.”

If you would like more information about Garvan, or leaving a bequest to Garvan in your will, please contact Carol O’Carroll on 02 9295 8117, or email c.o.carroll@garvan.org.au

Newly established awards support young Garvan scientists

The inaugural awards of $5,000 were presented to Dr David Gallego-Ortega and Dr Martin Smith to assist in attending key international conferences.

In June, Dr Gallego-Ortega will attend the Gordon Conference in Mammary Gland Development, to be held in Luca, Italy, where he has been selected to give an oral presentation. Dr Smith will attend the annual meeting of the RNA Society to be held in Quebec City, Canada, where he has also been selected to give an oral presentation.

The second award introduced at the AGM was established by CHAMP Private Equity, long term supporters of Garvan through Mr Bill Ferris AC and Mr Joseph Skrzynski AO. The CHAMP Young Pioneer Award has been established to assist an outstanding early career researcher in the establishment phase of their career.

The $10,000 award will help a Garvan researcher to initiate early-stage medical research opportunities through an innovative early career research project, and this year’s inaugural recipient was Dr Nicole Schonrock whose new project will assist to decipher the epitranscriptome (a regulation of gene expression that depends on biochemical modifications of messenger RNA) in brain function using sensitive genome-wide technologies to identify and map RNA modifications.

Congratulations to all recipients and thank you to our generous supporters at Heliflite and CHAMP Private Equity.
Feature story: Sifting through human history to solve the mysteries of prostate cancer

Garvan’s Human Comparative and Prostate Cancer Genomics laboratory focuses on human diversity and prostate cancer. While these might seem to be two very diverse areas of focus, they are not.

The human comparative side of the work concentrates on discovering where we come from as humans – what dictates who we are, as well as why diseases exist and why we are susceptible to them. The team does this by looking at early human origins – some of the earliest lineages from Africa, traces of which can still be found in modern humans.

Garvan’s prostate cancer genomics work aims to shed light on the genetic basis for both risk and development of prostate cancer. Ultimately, the goal is to develop DNA-based markers that can be used to determine how aggressive the disease is in an individual, ie who might die of prostate cancer, as opposed to dying with prostate cancer.

Human Comparative Research

One of the most significant points in history was the invention of agriculture. Most diseases we are fighting today have come about at this time in history. Humans lived 190,000 years as hunters and gatherers, but today we live in an extremely different world. Professor Hayes and her team are looking at how our genome has changed to adapt to this new environment, when we are coded to exist in a very different environment.

In 2010, Professor Vanessa Hayes led a team that generated the first complete personalised human DNA sequences for Africa, namely South African and Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and !Gubi*, a Kalahari Bushman from Namibia. She is now using her understanding of the complexities of the human genome to identify the inherited and acquired genetic events that cause prostate cancer.

One of the biggest problems faced by researchers is that genomics focuses on people living outside of Africa (particularly Europeans and Asians). However, if we want to understand who we are as modern humans, and accurately represent genetic variances, it is essential that African genomes are examined in databases worldwide. To date, Hayes has identified the most diverse human genomes within the Southern African Bushman (Khoesan) peoples. In contrast, Europeans and Asians show the least genomic diversity, having gone through a major ‘bottleneck’ (population reduction) when leaving Africa some 35,000 to 25,000 years ago.

“By sequencing the complete genomes of !Gubi and the Archbishop, we were able to add 1.3 million gene variants to the databases that weren’t there previously – simply because people hadn’t looked in Africa,” says Professor Hayes.

Prostate Cancer Genomics

There is a lot that we don’t know about prostate cancer. We do know that three factors influence prostate cancer risk. They are age, family history and, of particular interest to Garvan’s prostate cancer genomics lab, ethnic diversity. The second two are there must be a genetic element involved. Again, this takes Professor Hayes and her team’s focus back to Africa.

Hayes believes that Africa holds many secrets to understanding human disease that have not been tapped. For example the significant link to prostate cancer and aggressive prostate cancer disease observed in men of African ancestry.

African Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates of prostate cancer of any population, followed by European Americans, while rates are very low in Asians. This tells us there is a link to genetics, or inherited ancestry. Surprisingly, no one has been investigating this within Africa.

“Although the Archbishop has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, our current knowledge was unable to predict his disease status based on his DNA sequence,” says Hayes.

The team is currently studying African men from rural areas with aggressive prostate cancer who, unlike Australian men, have not been impacted by western trends in prostate cancer management. The team is using this unique resource as a comparative analysis to better understand both the environmental and genetic factors driving prostate cancer within Australia.

In January this year, Professor Hayes assumed the inaugural Petre Foundation Chair of Prostate Cancer Research. This has allowed the team to acquire a new genome mapping technology which, complimentary to Garvan’s genome sequencing technology, will allow them to map large genomic rearrangements that are assumed to be critical drivers of aggressive prostate cancer.

“Most people are looking at small pieces of DNA, and observing small changes,” says Professor Hayes. “We want to look at large chromosomal changes that are critical to prostate cancer development.

“This new technology means we can start to understand small and large alterations to the genome and what they mean. We can discover how many genomic changes can safely be carried without getting sick, or what signatures define aggressive disease. Our objective is to guide the development of targeted prostate cancer therapies, perhaps avoiding surgery and the often devastating side-effects.”

* Bushmen languages include a variety of clicks, which explains the use of characters in their names. The ‘t’ is a paledic click, made by pulling a flat tongue sharply down from the roof of the mouth.
Corporate Partnerships managed the marketing and corporate marketing for the Faculty of Commerce. I began my career in academic work, and we are a strong component of providing financial support for Garvan’s research, which is very different to product sales; or special fundraising giving; donating a percentage of staff contributing through workplace giving; or special fundraising events and promotions.

What inspires you about Garvan’s work?
I have been fortunate enough to work with several of the breast cancer researchers in my previous life, so I was aware of the world-class research carried out at Garvan. The opportunity to engage, promote and fundraise for the best-of-the-best was the real drawcard. This being said, Messina Gelato is located across the road, and was the icing on the ice cream cake for me!

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
I’m in the middle of a property renovation at the moment. So, there is a fine line between what I “enjoy” in my spare time, and what needs to get done before I move onto the next project.

Researcher profile Stuart Tangye
What is the current focus of your work?
Our work focuses on the human immune system and determining which genes are critical for the development and function of immune cells. We do this by studying patients with rare diseases caused by primary immune deficiencies. These are diseases typically caused by a mutation or error in a single gene. Despite there being approximately 30,000 genes in our DNA, the loss of function of one of these single genes is sufficient to render patients highly susceptible to infection with different microbes. This also makes the individual unable to respond to vaccination. So overall, they have severe inability to generate immune responses that, in normal healthy people, provide protection against all different types of infectious diseases.

The immune system also plays an important role in protecting us from the development of some types of cancer, such as lymphoma. These immunodeficient patients also have an increased incidence of malignancy. We study the immune cells in these patients, aiming to identify critical and non-redundant functions of specific genes in the development and function of different subsets of immune cells. From this, we try to understand how these defects directly cause the specific clinical features of these immune deficient conditions. Finally, we hope to identify molecules or pathways that could be targeted, not only in these patients, but also other individuals with immunological diseases, in order to enhance (eg in immune deficiency or vaccines) or inhibit (eg in autoimmunity) the function of immune cells.

What are recent findings of your work?
We have made some real insights into what makes the human immune system work - from the signals that are required for the generation of diverse populations of immune cells, through to what makes these cells function properly. Then, we either observe infections with viruses, bacteria or fungi, or are vaccinated against different pathogens. We have also shed light on why some types of immune cells are required for protection against only some microbes and not others. We have collaborated with labs at the National Institute of Health and Regent’s Park University in the USA, and generated insights into how different subsets of immune cells interact and work together.

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What is the biggest challenge in your area of research?
We work on incredibly rare diseases, some of these affect one in 100,000 to one in one million people; these often only affect one family that in most cases is isolated! After working on these diseases for a long time now, I don’t consider an individual as rare anymore. In that sense that rare anymore – some other diseases we have studied literally affect only a few families in the world or, in a recent case, a single individual. So accessing these patients from all corners of the globe is a real challenge. However, we are very lucky to collaborate with some great labs in the USA, Europe and Japan – as well as clinicians right across Australia – who are very enthusiastic about our research and are willing to send us samples from rare, precious and occasionally unique patients.

What do you enjoy doing away from the lab?
I have three young and adorable children, so I enjoy spending time with them, trying to be a great dad. That’s my real job! In between work and family, I enjoy cycling, swimming, sailing and travel – though I haven’t made it to the beach in quite a while.

Staff profile Leonie Walton, Head of Corporate Partnerships
Can you give us a brief outline of your recent work history?
I began my career in academic publishing, and then moved into marketing for the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at UNSW. I then decided to transition into the “Third Sector” and managed the marketing and corporate partnerships for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Prior to joining Garvan, I worked for the George Institute for Global Health which provided me with an overview of the entire field of medical research, which is very different to a corporate charity, and offers both great opportunities and challenges. Being surrounded by academics and researchers seems to have been a common thread throughout my career.

What does your role at Garvan involve?
Corporate Social Responsibility is a concept that is embraced by organisations, large and small, around the world. This means businesses are extremely conscious about how they interact with, and give back to, their local community, and the global community. My role is to introduce the world-class medical research carried out at Garvan to corporations, to help establish and nurture partnerships that will be mutually beneficial – they provide financial support for Garvan’s work, and we are a strong component in the organisation’s Corporate Social Responsibility program. Corporate support could be anything from the company making regular donations; staff contributing through workplace giving; donating a percentage of profit; or providing grants for fund-raising events and promotions.

What inspires you about Garvan’s work?
I have been fortunate enough to work with several of the breast cancer researchers in my previous life, so I was aware of the world-class research carried out at Garvan. The opportunity to engage, promote and fundraise for the best-of-the-best was the real draw card. This being said, Messina Gelato is located across the road, and was the icing on the ice cream cake for me!

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
I am in the middle of a property renovation at the moment. So, there is a fine line between what I “enjoy” in my spare time, and what needs to be done before I move onto the next project.

Celebrate with Garvan

The following events were recently celebrated, with guests making a donation to Garvan’s work in lieu of a gift.

Debbie & Diane for Mothers’ Day
Ann Bernfield’s 80th Birthday
Suse Blacksh’s Birthday
Ros Carberry’s 50th Birthday
Pamela Catty’s Birthday
Lola Craner’s 80th Birthday
Brian Goodacre’s Birthday
Diane Johnson’s Birthday
Jason and Tara Kitzler’s Wedding
Pamela’s 50th Birthday
Mimmo Lubrano’s 50th Birthday
Neville Moodie & Kim Yen’s Wedding
Alice & Ged’s Happy Engagement
Madhavi Parker’s 40th Birthday
In Celebration of Rob & Sammy Rogers
Debbie Small’s Birthday
Nicholas Stewart & Sarah Shands’ Wedding
Richard Sylvester’s Birthday
Adrian Wilden’s 70th Birthday

If you would like to celebrate your next event with Garvan, contact the Supporter Care Team on (02) 9295 8110.

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The Garvan Research Foundation has been on a mission to initiate an important conversation about cancer in regional South Australia. In early May, Garvan and corporate partner Ridley AgriProducts joined forces to take the Cancer in the Community Awareness Program to the Murray Bridge, Waseley and Roseworthy townships.

The free forum set about to demystify cancer for the South Australian communities, by educating about the latest in cancer research, suggesting practical ways to reduce individual cancer risk and the best ways to access local resources and cancer support.

According to Ridley AgriProducts’ General Manager, Anne-Marie Mooney, the company’s partnership with the Garvan Research Foundation and sponsorship of ‘Cancer in the Community’ is one way Ray Ridley AgriProducts is helping the Murray Bridge, Waseley and Roseworthy communities.

“Unfortunately, regional communities in South Australia are hit pretty hard by cancer. I think everyone knows someone who has been touched by the disease at some point.

For Ridley, it is important that the community has a better understanding of the disease, treatments and progress in cancer research. Events like this give people in regional areas rare access to experts and information,” said Ms Mooney.

“The community forum is for everyone and gives locals access to leading experts that they normally would not have, to learn about these important health messages and research.”

Dr Darren Saunders, a senior scientist within the Cancer Research Division of the Garvan Institute of Medical Research was joined by Mr Don Piro of the Barossa Valley Prostate Group and Ms Tania Carcone of the Lower Murray Women’s Cancer Support Group to continue the cancer conversation and gain an understanding of the needs of cancer patients in remote areas.

To find out where Garvan’s next regional visit will be, please email healthinitiative@garvan.org.au

Garvan Gala supporting world-class scientists
The fourth annual Garvan Gala raised funds for Garvan’s work building an environment from which Garvan can recruit the world’s very best researchers. Guests were treated to a menu designed by world famous chefs, Neil Perry AM and Guillame Brahimi MC, ABC News Breakfast presenter, Ms Virginia Trioli kept guests entertained, as did performers Nathan Allgood and Charlotte Rhiane Warinner, both John Brown Youth Achievement scholarship winners.

This year, the locked box contained a stunning Paspaley Australian South Sea Pearl Necklace valued at $55,600. Guests bid on live auction items including a trip to New York, having their genome sequenced, a Stephen Ormandy sculpture, an afternoon on the super maxi yacht, Perpetual Loyal and a Hong Kong getaway. The silent auction and raffle were also popular.

Sincere thanks to all the generous sponsors and supporters who donated wonderful prizes for the event.

Professor Joy Lytton, Dr John Schilke and Mr Chris and NSW Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research, The Hon. Jillian Skinner.
Clinical Studies

Pre-diabetes study
We are looking for healthy male volunteers who have close relatives with Type 2 diabetes for a study investigating the role of the autonomic nervous system activity in the development of the disease. The study involves visiting the Garvan Institute in Darlinghurst for one morning during working hours. If you are willing, aged 50 to 60 years and healthy, please contact Lynne (02) 9295 8231 or Dorit (02) 9295 8309 or email crf@garvan.org.au (St Vincent’s HREC Ref 12/102).

Osteoporosis study
Are you female and over 55? Have you had a vertebral (spinal) fracture due to osteoporosis? We are looking for volunteers to be part of a clinical trial that compares a new osteoporosis treatment to a current medication. Both are designed to stop further fractures. For further information please contact Dr Yvonne Selecki on (02) 9295 8276 or y selecki@garvan.org.au, or Vanessa Travers on (02) 9295 8269 or email v.travers@garvan.org.au (Southern Health HREC Ref HREC/12/SHA/6).

Brown fat and blood pressure study
Brown fat is a special kind of fat which burns fat in the body. We are looking for volunteers who have high blood pressure to participate in a trial investigating the effect of a medication on brown fat. Participants must be aged 18 to 45 years and currently on one blood pressure medication. For further information please contact Dr Paul Lee (02) 9295 8416 or email p.lee@garvan.org.au (St Vincent’s HREC Ref 14/SVH/105).

In Memoriam February to June 2014. Donations have been made in memory of:

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Gordon Adamson
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Jessie Ash
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Peter Male
John S Mansell
Rose Mathewson
Catherine M McCarroll
Trish McCormack
Valentine (Sheila) McMahon
George Mellis,
Robert Montgomery & Mitchell Montgomery
Katherine S Mignot
Frank Anthony Milazzo
Maria Mirigliani
Beverley Grace Monaghan
(née Willingham)
Chris Moore
Meredith Morey
Elizabeth Morris
Barry Morrison
My Nan
Yuko Nashimoto
Doreen Needs
Adrian Notley
Simon Oomsen
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