



## MELANOMA MATTERS

Spring 2006

### UWA – OUR FOUNDING SUPPORTER

From day one, The University of Western Australia (UWA) has been a strong source of support for the Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre (SKMRC), based within the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR). In fact, the Centre would not have developed so rapidly if UWA had not made the commitment to match dollar-for-dollar all funds raised by the Centre during our first five years.

UWA Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson, said the University was committed to help the Centre tackle melanoma and make its mark in the global skin cancer research arena.

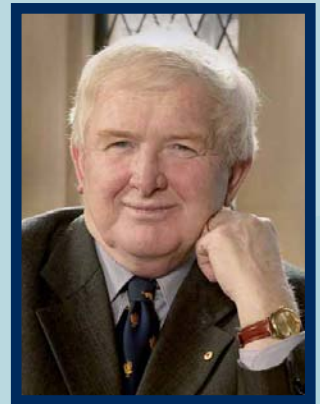
"The University is committed to achieving international excellence and this is reflected in our belief in WAIMR's proven capability to generate high-quality research discoveries to improve the health and lives of people not only in our State, but world-wide," Professor Robson said.

"Knowing that this drive and ambition is being applied to the SKMRC with the same vigour gives me great confidence that the Centre will be able to deliver life-changing results for the WA community.

"Research into melanoma is crucial, primarily due to its growing prevalence in Australia and the high number of young people affected by the cancer."

Melanoma has the fastest growing incidence rate of any cancer. It is now the third most common cancer in Australia and one of the most deadly to affect 15 to 39 year olds.

"The SKMRC promises much for melanoma patients, their families and to the State as it furthers our medical research capabilities and positions itself as a world-leader in the quest to beat this deadly cancer," Professor Robson said.



### AN INSIGHT INTO THE FUTURE AT SKMRC

The head of the SKMRC research team and WAIMR's Laboratory for Genetic Epidemiology, Professor Lyle Palmer has a vision for the SKMRC to become a global influence in melanoma research.

Professor Palmer is determined to make this a reality in the not so distant future and, as a winner of WA Business News '40under40' top entrepreneur awards in 2005, he has the skills and drive to make it happen.

Here Professor Palmer talks about his vision for the SKMRC, the next five years and other projects he and his team are working on.

#### Q. Where do you see the SKMRC in five years time?

In five years time I'm certain the SKMRC will have become an internationally-renowned resource for melanoma research – one that researchers from across the world will come to for accurate, ground-breaking epidemiological and genetic information about melanoma.

#### Q. Where is the Centre's research headed in the next five years?

In that time I see that our research will have progressed in leaps and bounds and we will have a much greater understanding of the causes of skin cancer. I also see that our research will have led to the development of biopsy-free skin cancer diagnosis, less invasive and earlier detection methods like blood-tests to spot melanoma, and even ways to gauge the probability of melanoma developing in people who are deemed to be at increased risk.

At the moment, we have a limited understanding of why people

respond differently to treatments for skin cancer, but it won't be long before we have a better understanding of the genes that influence response to therapies and therefore be able to develop more effective therapies and target existing therapies to those who will benefit most.

#### Q. Where are your other WAIMR projects headed?

Over the next five years I'd expect the Laboratory for Genetic Epidemiology to continue to grow and flourish and that our programs researching conditions such as cancer, heart disease, asthma, sleep apnea, diabetes, obesity and eye disease had all made real contributions to our understanding of the causes of common diseases and that we had begun to translate our knowledge into improved clinical practice and public health. I'd also anticipate that our large-scale projects, such as the Joondalup Family Health Study (JFHS), would be up and running and recognized as premier international research resources.

#### Q. What is the JFHS about?

Due to start in 2007, the JFHS will involve collecting health information from up to 80,000 volunteers living in the City of Joondalup. Information gathered will include details on lifestyle and diet, as well as basic measurements, a blood sample and regular health checks. Information collected will also include measures relevant to skin cancer and sun exposure.

Recently, the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Dr Ken Michael AC, has become the overall patron of the Study. Burns expert and 2005 Australian of the Year Dr Fiona Wood is the medical patron.



## SLASH YOUR MELANOMA RISK: LIFESAVING TIPS FOR A BRIGHTER SUMMER

*This information was prepared with the approval of The Cancer Council WA (TCCWA). WAIMR and TCCWA have also formed a partnership called the Cancer Council Clinical Trials WA, to promote participation in cancer clinical trials in WA.*

With summer fast approaching, the SKMRC team is urging everyone to consider ways of reducing their risk of melanoma, one of the deadliest skin cancers. In WA, about 1,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed each year. But melanoma is also one of the most preventable forms of cancer and we can all take steps to lower our own risk.

Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, so protection from the sun is an easy and effective way of reducing the risk. Make it a priority to:

- Limit your exposure to the sun during 10am and 3pm, when UV radiation levels are highest
- Stay in full shade where possible
- Wear protective clothing (long-sleeved shirts, longer-style pants and skirts), 30+ broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat and close-fitting sunglasses

We are all at risk of developing skin cancer but some genetic and individual risk factors can increase a person's risk of developing melanoma. They include:

- Having a pale complexion
- Having red or fair hair
- Having skin that tans poorly or is sensitive to the sun
- Having freckles or many moles
- A family history of the disease
- Having spent your childhood in Australia
- Working or spending a lot of leisure time in the sun
- Not protecting your skin from the sun
- Having skin that has developed sunspots
- Regularly using a solarium, sunbed or sunlamp

Experts recommend we self-check our skin, looking for suspect moles or lesions regularly - a simple routine that could save your life.

When checking for irregular moles, remember the easy ABCD approach:

- A – Asymmetry:** The spot or lesion is not a mirror image if divided in half in any direction.
- B – Border:** An irregular or spreading border.
- C – Colour:** The spot has a number of different colours running through it.
- D – Diameter:** The spot is changing or growing in size and diameter.

If you find a suspect spot, make an appointment to see your GP straight away.

For more information on skin cancer visit [www.cancerwa.asn.au](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au) or call The Cancer Council Helpline on 131120.

The Cancer Council Helpline can also provide information about support for people living with cancer and their families, including counseling and the practical help that is available.

Visit [www.skmrc.org.au](http://www.skmrc.org.au) to stay informed about the research being undertaken by the SKMRC.



Image courtesy of The Cancer Council WA

## WEBSITE

THE SKMRC IS NOW ONLINE!

Take a look at our new website [www.skmrc.org.au](http://www.skmrc.org.au) and keep up to date with our latest news and research progress.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

We have a growing list of fundraising events on the calendar now the weather is warming up!

**November 17:** A garden fashion parade to raise funds for our Centre will showcase the latest styles in beautiful surrounds at Cottesloe.

**November 21:** Marks the return of the SKMRC ABC Golf Day, so why not join ABC personalities and fellow sport lovers for another 18 holes at Wembley Golf Complex. Judging by the success of last year's event, it promises to be a great chance to test your skills, relax and enjoy a great day out while supporting a worthwhile cause.

**February 3:** The SKMRC will be holding a fundraising race day which will be held at the Ascot race course. More details of the day will be included in our next newsletter.

To find out more, check out the website or call us on (08) 9224 0333.

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All donations to the Centre over \$2 are tax deductible.

