

## MelanomaWA Ball

About 250 people who enjoyed the inaugural 2011 Bupa/MelanomaWA Ball at the Perth Convention Centre went home with an improved knowledge of melanoma and how to identify potential problems.

Organiser and MelanomaWA Founder, Clinton Heal, said that the aim of the Ball was to raise awareness about the cancer, although it was also a successful fundraising event.

"I asked the audience how many of them knew very little about melanoma and one third of the guests raised their hands," he said. "That had certainly changed by the end of the night."

As well as an informative talk by Dr Carolyn Williams about the proposed Melanoma research centre in Subiaco which will provide a comprehensive variety of services for melanoma patients, guests enjoyed dinner, an auction and danced the night away to the music of Darren Reid and the Soul City Groove.



Clint Heal and Dani York



## Mangos for Melanoma

Summer is upon us and what could be yummiier than slicing into some juicy mango, straight from the fridge?

SKMRC is running its first Mango fundraising drive this year, with boxes of these Carnarvon grown mangos selling for just \$40 and part proceeds going to help our melanoma research.

To order, please go to our website <http://www.skmrc.org.au> and click on the order button. All orders need to be in by Friday 6th of January and your pre-paid box can be picked up from 21 Lovegrove Close Mt Claremont between 10am and noon on 13th of January, 2012. Enjoy!

## SKMRC Welcomes New Committee Member

The Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre is pleased to announce that eminent melanoma researcher, Professor John Thompson, has joined its committee.



Professor Thompson is the Executive Director of the Melanoma Institute Australia, one of the world's largest melanoma treatment and research centres.

Professor Thompson's current research projects include investigating whether certain melanomas are resistant to chemotherapy and looking at chemotherapy techniques for limb tumours which can't be treated surgically.

On top of his role at the Melanoma Institute Australia, Professor Thompson is the Chair of Melanoma and Surgical Oncology of the University of Sydney, based at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

The SKMRC brought Professor Thompson to Perth last year to speak at the annual community seminar on melanoma.

"We are delighted Professor Thompson has agreed to join our committee," said SKMRC Manager, Dr Carolyn Williams.

"He brings a wealth of experience not only in the field of melanoma, but also as Director of the pre-eminent melanoma research institute in Australia. This appointment will provide valuable insights for us at a crucial time as SKMRC steps into the national and international melanoma stage," she said.

## Our Research Team

### New approach to Melanoma Treatment

A major hurdle to treating melanoma patients is that the lethal skin cancer doesn't respond well to standard treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Now, thanks to a grant from the SKMRC, researchers Keith Giles, Michael Epis and an honours student, Rikki Brown, are working on a solution to this problem, trying to find new approaches to prevent melanoma growth and invasion.

"If melanoma is found early and excised from the skin, the survival rate is very good, but once the melanoma invades through other tissues, there really aren't many effective treatments," Dr Giles says. "Many of these patients will survive for as little as six months, so there is an urgent need to find new approaches to treat this disease and improve their outcome."

"We are working with microRNAs, which are very short RNAs that we have discovered are able to switch off signalling pathways that are critical melanoma growth and invasion.

"Although we're in the early stages of this project which is about understanding the mechanics of how this works, we're hopeful the microRNAs could ultimately be developed as possible new therapies for melanomas that respond poorly to standard drugs," he says.

Co-researcher Michael Epis says the team is hopeful that this possible new treatment could one day be used in combination with existing targeted therapies.

"The SKMRC funding has also allowed us to take on a very bright honours student, as well as paying for the sophisticated tools needed for this work," he says.

"We are all dedicated to fighting melanoma because we know what Vonnie (SKMRC founder Yvonne Kirkbride) has been through in her life and that has been a driving force for us. We've got the responsibility to find a good outcome for people who might be diagnosed with melanoma in the future. We don't want to let Vonnie down."



L to R: Doctor Keith Giles and Mike Epis



### Exploring Nature's Therapeutic Potential

An interest in the chemistry of marine life ranging from sea horses to the humble sea sponge has led SKMRC researcher Dr Robin Scaife to make some fascinating discoveries about how compounds found in marine organisms may be able to destroy cancer cells.

Dr Scaife, who is with Molecular Discovery Systems at WAIMR's Nedlands campus hopes his findings will lead to the development of new drugs and improved treatments for patients with cancers including melanoma.

"A lot of drugs are based on natural products, and SKMRC funding has allowed us to access and test marine organisms collected from Western Australian waters," he says. "These are mainly marine sponges although the more unusual the life form, the more complex their chemistry may be."

In addition to testing marine natural products, Dr Scaife works extensively with synthetic molecules designed to have potential for drug development. These synthetic products are manufactured in the laboratory; a process which also relies heavily on SKMRC funding.

"I test all our chemical resources, natural or synthetic, by screening them for compounds which kill cancerous cells," he explains. "In some cases I'm looking for biological activity which selectively destroys cancer cells, but because most current use of chemotherapy is based on the fact that cancer cells divide quite quickly, I also think that if you target rapidly proliferating cells this will be useful in cancer treatments"

Although Dr Scaife was only awarded the SKMRC Discovery grant in 2010, his research is already producing exciting results. "One marine sponge extract showed the type of activity I'm looking for and dozens of our synthetic molecules also cause cancer cells to die," he says.

Dr Scaife says that, in addition to the extensively used cancer drug Taxol®, another good example of the direction in which his work could lead is the cancer drug Ombrabulin, developed by a French pharmaceutical company.

"Scientists in France discovered a plant-derived compound that disrupts the protein fibers in cells, and this new class of cancer drugs is being tested in cancer trials around the World "It's exciting to see how far we've come in this field and in my case, it would have been much more difficult to carry out this drug discovery research without the generous financial support of the SKMRC.

### Tips for Sun Protection

Don't be caught red faced this Summer. Remember that:



- ✓ Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. At least two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the age of 70.
- ✓ Re-apply sunscreen every two hours, or more often, when sweating.
- ✓ Reflective surfaces, such as water, increase your risk of sun damage as these surfaces also reflect ultraviolet light. In some cases you can almost get a double dose of UV, directly from the sun and then through reflection.
- ✓ Slip on a long sleeved shirt, slop on some sunscreen, slap on a hat which protects your ears and neck, slide on Australian standard sunglasses and seek shade!