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Media Statement

NEW CENTRE BOOSTS CANCER HOPES

A new research centre set up in memory of a young Perth golfer is paving the way for some of WA's leading scientists to begin potentially groundbreaking research into skin cancer.

The Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre, to be based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), has been established to commemorate the life of the talented sportsman who died from melanoma last year at the age of 27.

WAIMR Director Peter Klinken said the centre would enable the Institute to become a world leader in the quest to beat one of the most deadly and prevalent forms of cancer.

"Melanoma is an insidious disease that strikes many age groups, and one of the biggest problems is that often there are few visible symptoms until the cancer has progressed to a late stage," Professor Klinken said.

"We are worried because melanoma is becoming more prevalent, in fact, in Australia it is now the third most common form of cancer.

"There are over 1000 new cases of melanoma diagnosed in Western Australia each year, and it is the cancer most likely to affect 15-39 year olds, so it's clear more needs to be done to stop the trend."

Professor Klinken said the potential for the centre, which had been made possible through fundraising efforts by the Kirkbride family, their friends and a generous commitment by the University of WA to match the funding dollar for dollar over five years, was enormous.

"The centre will allow WAIMR researchers to for the first time investigate the genetic causes of melanoma," he said.

"We see this sort of advanced research as a crucial step in finding that vital breakthrough we're all waiting for in the treatment of skin cancer, just as has happened in so many other forms of cancer."

Professor Klinken said while there were awareness programs relating to the dangers of spending too much time in the sun, there had been few new breakthroughs in the treatment of the disease once it was established.

"Because melanoma can move from a primary site to secondary sites, it can be very difficult to treat successfully," he said.

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The new research will be led by Professor Lyle Palmer, who heads up WAIMR's world renowned Laboratory of Genetic Epidemiology, which utilises Western Australia's superior health record systems.

Australia has one of the world's highest rates of melanoma, and Western Australia is second only to Queensland in incidence rates.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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