



Thursday March 16th, 2006

## **WA TEAM UNVEILS AMBITIOUS SKIN CANCER PROJECT**

WA medical researchers have been given the green light to begin an ambitious research project that could revolutionise the diagnosis and treatment of melanoma.

A team at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) will be asking all newly-diagnosed skin cancer patients in WA to volunteer to be part of the groundbreaking study.

The project is being led by Professor Lyle Palmer, head of WAIMR's Laboratory for Genetic Epidemiology and the WAIMR-based Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre, and will be run by research officer Lara McDonald.

"Every year more than 1,000 West Australians get the devastating news that they have melanoma – we're hoping every one of them will want to help our quest to find out how to better understand and treat skin cancer," said Ms McDonald.

Volunteers diagnosed with melanoma would be asked to supply health information and a blood sample to allow researchers to probe the genetic and environmental causes of skin cancer.

WAIMR Director and cancer researcher Professor Peter Klinken said, "This will be one of the most comprehensive projects of its type anywhere in the world and will ensure that WA is an international leader in skin cancer research."

Ms McDonald said one of the biggest problems with melanoma was that there were often very few visible symptoms until the cancer had progressed to a late stage.

"Finding better, less invasive options for diagnosing skin cancer earlier, such as with a blood test instead of biopsy, would likely be one of the spin-offs of this research," said Ms McDonald.

"There have been very few new breakthroughs in the treatment of melanoma, so we're hopeful that this project will also lead to advances in that area, which will ultimately save lives."

Because melanoma is often diagnosed at a late stage and can move from a primary site to secondary sites, it can be very difficult to treat successfully.

Potential volunteer patients for the study would be identified through the WA Cancer Registry and sent a letter of invitation via their doctor.

The first phase of the study, running from March to June, will be a pilot program.

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- Melanoma is one of the most deadly cancers and is the cancer most likely to affect 15-39 year olds.
- It is becoming more prevalent, now ranking as the third most common form of cancer in Australia.
- WA has the second highest rate of melanoma in Australia, behind Queensland.
- The Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre (SKMRC), based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research, was set up in memory of 27-year-old Perth golfer Scott Kirkbride, who died in 2004 from melanoma.
- The SKMRC was 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.
- Donations to the SKMRC can be made by phoning (08) 244 0333 or see [www.skmrc.org.au](http://www.skmrc.org.au).

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