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Media Statement

DIABETES FUNDING GROUP WELCOMES LAUNCH OF NEW BIOTECH COMPANY

WA's peak diabetes research funding group has welcomed the creation of a new biotech company that could help fast-track fresh therapies to reduce the health complications of diabetes.

Supported by investment from IP Group, Monash University (Monash) and The University of Western Australia (UWA), the company – RAGE Biotech – is developing new approaches to modulate the Receptor for Advanced Glycation End-products (RAGE).

Activation of RAGE contributes to the development of diabetes and its complications. New therapeutics blocking RAGE are therefore likely to prove significant for the prevention and treatment of diabetes.

Diabetes Research WA Executive Director Sherl Westlund welcomed RAGE Biotech's arrival.

"This is wonderful progress and very exciting given that Diabetes Research WA has channelled \$60,000 into the work of UWA Professor Kevin Pflieger, who is looking at how to inhibit RAGE triggering signalling in cells that leads to inflammation and cell injury," she said.

"We are hopeful RAGE Biotech will help fast-track much-needed new medications to limit the complications of type 2 diabetes developing, with around 463 million adults worldwide living with diabetes and most of those type 2 cases."

The company is immediately focused on developing novel therapies designed to help patients with chronic inflammatory lung diseases such as severe asthma, cystic fibrosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is the fourth leading cause of mortality and morbidity globally.

Research shows that patients with COPD are more likely to be affected by type 2 diabetes, with chronic inflammation a key factor in both conditions.

RAGE Biotech is founded on intellectual property co-developed by leading researchers from Monash, UWA, Murdoch University and the Baker Institute, licensed to RAGE Biotech by Monash Innovation.

The breakthrough discoveries were led by endocrinology expert Professor Merlin Thomas of the Central Clinical School, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University, in collaboration with Professor Kevin Pflieger of UWA and The Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research and Professor Steve Wilton of Murdoch University.

RAGE Biotech will test two novel approaches to modulate RAGE. The first was developed in collaboration with Prof Wilton at Murdoch University, who developed the first FDA-approved therapy for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. A second approach was developed in collaboration with Prof Pflieger, Head of Molecular Endocrinology and Pharmacology at UWA's Centre for Medical Research and the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research.

"Often it's not easy to turn inflammation down without disrupting pathways needed for good health. But RAGE only turns up when things are going wrong, which makes it such a great target," said Professor Merlin Thomas.

"This is the beginning of an exciting translational journey towards a new therapy targeting RAGE, that would not have been possible without collaboration and funding from our universities and IP Group."

Managing Director of IP Group Australia, Michael Molinari, said IP Group was excited to invest to build and support outstanding intellectual-property based companies, embracing early-stage ideas from university partners across the Group of Eight and University of Auckland.

“This is a particularly exciting investment for IP Group in a truly Australian technology, and a great example of what can be done when researchers from our world-leading institutions across the Group of Eight and elsewhere come together.” Dr Molinari said.

Dr Alastair Hick, Senior Director of Monash Innovation, said: “We welcome investment in this program from IP Group, supporting our efforts to translate the research outcome of a true Australian multi-institutional cross-collaboration, further validating the quality of our research and translation teams”

“Universities and medical research institutes are well known as sources of new medicines and being able to partner with IP Group is so important in terms of giving these breakthroughs a chance at being developed and commercialised”, Prof Tim Colmer, UWA’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research said.

Diabetes Australia states that every day, 280 Australians develop diabetes – or one every 5 minutes.

Including an estimated half a million undiagnosed type 2 diabetes cases, 1.7 million Australians have diabetes and this number is growing at a rate faster than other chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

Type 2 diabetes accounts for 85% of all diabetes and is increasing.

Diabetes Research WA is currently seeking donations to support its 2021 research grants program.

Head to diabetesresearchwa.com.au to find out more or donate.

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