

November 14, 2018

Media Statement

GRANTS AWARDED TO HELP DRIVE NEW DIABETES RESEARCH

WA's peak diabetes research funding group, Diabetes Research WA, has revealed on World Diabetes Day 2018 the winners of its 2019 research grants – and, for the first time, three projects have been supported.

These grants fund West Australian-based research that holds enormous potential to change the lives of people with diabetes, said the charity's executive director, Sherl Westlund.

"There's still a need to undertake research because while we can manage diabetes, we don't yet have all the answers to preventing health complications – or a cure," she said.

The first grant to be awarded was to Associate Professor Kevin Pflieger from the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research.

He and his team have received \$60,000 to progress their work into a molecule called RAGE (the Receptor for Advanced Glycation End-products) – a molecule that sits in the membrane surrounding cells that are injured or stressed, such as in type 2 diabetes.

When activated, it triggers signalling in cells that leads to inflammation and cell injury, and this team has found a way to inhibit this process that should, in turn, limit the complications of type 2 diabetes developing.

The second successful grant recipient was Dr Aveni Haynes, a Research Fellow at the Telethon Kids Institute.

Dr Haynes and her team will use continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) to assess blood sugar levels in children at high risk – but who have not yet developed – type 1 diabetes.

There is evidence that high blood sugar levels in children can be abnormal some years before they develop type 1 symptoms, however no previous studies have investigated the pattern of glucose levels in very young children at risk of the condition; the project has direct relevance to clinical care of WA children at high risk of developing type 1 diabetes.

The third recipient was Assistant Professor Vance Matthews, Group Leader, Basic Science, at The University of Western Australia's School of Biomedical Sciences.

This is the first time we have funded an extension of a project we've previously supported in order to help ensure powerful WA research continues on to a point where it can positively impact patient care.

The first stage of this work into the "firefighter-like" TNFSF14 protein was funded by us in 2014. The project aims to create an improved anti-obesity medication to help reduce rates of type 2 diabetes. The work may also give rise to a new way to tackle type 1 diabetes in patients that still have beta cells.

TNFSF14 has been shown in mice fed a high-fat diet to play a role in helping stop the body developing obesity and type 2 diabetes. The next step for the team is to design compounds that can activate TNFSF14 receptors and test them in select human cells and mice with pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

"We look forward to watching these projects progress and thank all of our donors for making our research grants possible," said Ms Westlund.

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MEDIA CONTACT: Natalie Caudle natalie@capturemedia.com.au, 0407 984 435