

2019 CANCER RESEARCHERS

The 2019 recipients of Can Too's annual round of cancer research funding: nine early career cancer researchers and two major cancer research projects.

These individuals and projects were chosen as they show the most promising research available in Australia.

Thank you to the Can Too community for all your fundraising efforts from 2018 to make this investment possible.



DR CAMILLE GUILLEREY
Blood cancer researcher

Researcher at the Mater Research Institute in Brisbane.

Camille has contributed to research that demonstrates that 'killer' immune cells can slow the growth of blood cancers, and that the functioning of these cells can be stimulated by certain immunotherapy drugs. She is studying how to better educate these 'killer' cells through vaccination research, so they can recognise and eliminate cancer cells. This work should help in the design of better treatments.

"I'm fascinated by how our immune cells interact to protect us from infections and cancer."



DR KELLY BROOKS
Skin cancer researcher

Research officer at QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute.

Kelly has investigated the role of two genes that influence if and how the melanoma will spread beyond the eye. Kelly is currently looking at a particular signalling pathway that is altered in approximately 90 per cent of uveal melanoma cases, with the aim to find ways of targeting this altered pathway and ultimately develop new treatments for uveal melanoma.

In approximately 50 per cent of uveal melanoma patients, the cancer will spread to other sites in the body and currently there are no effective systemic treatments available for this.



DR FERNANDO GUIMARAES
Blood cancer researcher

Scientist at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Victoria.

Dr Fernando Guimaraes is focused on immunology research, particularly into cells that constantly monitor, recognise and kill other, altered cells in the body – the natural-killer lymphocytes.

In his work the grants are especially helpful, because research using a patient's own immune system is risky and expensive, he says.

"Government funds are not enough to develop all promising projects and fundraising can make a big difference."



DR ZEYAD NASSAR
Prostate cancer researcher

Scientist at the University of Adelaide Medical School.

Zeyad will evaluate the targeting of lipid metabolism pathways in prostate cancer. He aims to use the information he discovers to introduce new treatment options, especially at the late stage of the disease when it's notoriously resistant to currently available drugs.

"We hope this will significantly impact prostate cancer mortality."



DR NAJOUA LALAOUI
Blood cancer researcher

A senior postdoctoral fellow at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research.

Najoua's work focuses on cancer therapeutic targets. She investigates the different ways by which cancer cells can die in order to develop new drugs to treat cancer.

Her findings have been published in top ranked oncology and scientific journals and led to the filing of international patents for new cancer drugs.



DR SARAH HANCOCK
Gastro-intestinal cancer researcher

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales School of Medical Sciences.

Pancreatic cancer has a notoriously low survival rate, which hasn't improved in the past 20 years. Sarah aims to detect one or more metabolic pathways (biochemical reactions) linked to the disease that can be targeted with new drugs. This could make chemo more effective, improving survival rates.



DR VIVIAN KAHL
Developing new ways to improve cancer therapy

Research officer at the Children's Medical Research Institute in Sydney.

Vivian is currently developing a new technique known as Telomere Fiber-FISH (TFF) to measure telomere lengths and what affects them, particularly in cancer cells. She aims to validate TFF in a panel of cancer cells to help provide a screening platform for new cancer therapies. The work has significant promise for prediction, diagnosis and treatment.



DR TRACY O'MARA
Gynaecological cancers researcher

Researcher at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute.

Tracy recently led the largest genetic study of endometrial cancer, identifying 16 genetic markers which predispose women to the disease.

Ovarian and endometrial cancer represent the most lethal and common gynaecological cancers in Australia. Tracy is combining genetic data from both diseases to identify changes in genetic sequences that predispose women to them. The result, she hopes, will be more effective treatments and new drugs.



DR PRAHLAD RANINGA
Breast cancer researcher

Post-Doctoral Research Officer at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Brisbane.

Prahlad's research is focused on identifying novel molecular targets for therapy. He's also studying the molecular mechanism that may cause drug resistance in patients, and identifying ways to overcome "chemoresistance" in cancers.

"Most patients initially respond to treatment but in a year or two the disease relapses and is fatal, which is why it's so crucial to develop new treatments for this type of cancer."



Research Project: Understanding the mechanisms that cause acute myeloid leukaemia.

DR JUSTIN WONG
The University of Sydney

This project has the potential to increase knowledge and understanding of mechanisms that cause cancer as well as future diagnostic approaches and treatments in many cancers. By identifying the molecular abnormalities that occur in acute myeloid leukaemia, Dr Wong hopes to be able to establish new targeted drugs or genetic approaches to restore normal activity and stop this deadly cancer in its tracks.



Research Project: Developing a simple test to ensure advanced melanoma patients get the right drug for their disease.

DR JAMES WILMOTT
2020 NSW Premier's Award for Wildfire Highly Cited Publication.

The Melanoma Institute Australia

This study could lead to the introduction of a simple test in the earliest stages of treatment planning for patients who are diagnosed with advanced melanoma. This would provide critical information for decision-making and ensure patients are offered the treatments most likely to be effective against their cancer.