

16 July 2016

Media release

Major boost for Peter Mac's Cancer Immunotherapy Research Program

Peter Mac's Cancer Immunotherapy Research Program has received a major boost with the construction of a new lab to be housed on Level 13 of the \$1 billion Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre building.

The lab will form part of the Ian Potter Centre for New Treatments announced by the Minister for Health, The Hon. Jill Hennessy MP today. It will be led by Professor Joe Trapani, Executive Director of Cancer Research and Head of the Cancer Immunology Research Program at Peter Mac.

"Immunotherapy is the first totally new treatment modality for cancer in over 50 years and it is already revolutionising cancer care as we know it.

"These new facilities, made possible through the foresight and generosity of the Ian Potter Foundation, will help us to accelerate more breakthroughs towards truly personalised cancer treatments.

"This can only mean more Victorians affected by cancer will have access to the very latest in care and potential cures through immune-based therapies," according to Professor Trapani.

Professor Trapani leads Australia's largest and longest-standing cancer immunology and immunotherapy program which focuses on basic cell and molecular biology, through to Peter Mac-led international clinical trials for new immunotherapy treatments for melanoma, breast, lung and blood cancers.

Among thousands of beneficiaries of this research is Peter McNeil from Eagle Point near Bairnsdale in Victoria. Peter is being treated at Peter Mac on a clinical trial of combination immunotherapy for advanced stage Melanoma led by Professor Grant McArthur.

"Two years ago they gave me 3 to 12 months to live. I've had surgery, chemotherapy, radiation treatment. Nothing could stop the cancer. But this latest treatment has. It's similar to the types of drugs that saved Ron Walker's life.

"Today, thanks to these immune therapies, I have had 70% shrinkage of my tumour and my outlook is really good. I am just so grateful to everyone here," Peter said.

About Peter Mac's Cancer Immunotherapy Research Program

Now with eight integrated laboratories, a large cohort of researchers and students, and prestigious research grants and fellowships, Peter Mac's immunotherapy program makes critical discoveries, including mechanistic insights into cancer immune surveillance, the molecular and cellular functions of killer T cells and human cancer susceptibility related to immune deficiency states.

Peter Mac's research on adoptive T cell (CAR T Cell) immunotherapy has been translated into clinical trials of acute myeloid leukaemia. This research leads the way in human clinical trials, which results in new drugs and new ways of managing and treating cancer, particularly for those affected by melanoma and blood cancers.

Drug discovery efforts include a program funded by the Wellcome Trust to develop perforin inhibitors to block rejection of allogenic bone marrow stem cells administered to cancer patients following high dose chemotherapy.

Peter Mac's Cancer Immunotherapy Research Program was established in 2000 and its outcomes have benefited from the support of continuous National Health and Medical Research Council Program Grant funding since 2003, international grants from US Department of Defence, US Komen Foundation, Wellcome Trust UK, multiple international industry sources and multiple grants and fellowships from Cancer Council Victoria and the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

The program's innovations have also attracted major licensing agreements for drug development with the (Wellcome Trust UK) and CAR T cells (Juno Therapeutics).

-ENDS-