

QUEENSLAND KIDNEY RESEARCHER APPLAUDED BY NATIONS MEDICAL RESEARCH COMMUNITY
April 6 2005

Melissa Little, a scientist from the Institute for Molecular Bioscience (IMB) at UQ was presented with the prestigious GlaxoSmithKline Australia Award for Research Excellence for her contribution to the development of new treatments for renal disease.

Speaking at the award ceremony attended by around 300 of Australia's top medical research community, Associate Professor Little said there was a real need for new therapies to develop new technologies and strategies to treat kidney disease.

"With about 7,500 end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patients in Australia receiving dialysis at a total cost of AU\$375 million per annum, kidneys available for transplantation do not meet demand," she said.

"The kidneys not only filter blood to produce urine but also regulate blood pressure and red blood cell number, various hormones and growth factors. If your kidneys fail, you will need dialysis or organ transplantation to survive, both of which don't fix the problem."

Associate Professor Little's research has long focused on developing new treatments through understanding kidney development and the causes of renal disease.

Little chairs the Renal Regeneration Consortium, a research team of 12 national experts in the fields of developmental biology, molecular genetics, bioinformatics and stem cell biology, working to develop new technologies to repair kidneys damaged by chronic kidney disease.

"We are investigating the potential of stem cell technology to restore or replace damaged or diseased tissues in the kidney," she said.

In 2002, Nephrogenix Pty Ltd was set-up to commercialise the outcomes of the group and is currently developing technologies to enable the isolation of stem cells and growth factors that give rise to new kidney tissue and repair damaged tissue. Nephrogenix eventually aims to administer these cells to patients with, or at risk of ESRD.

Speaking at the Award presentation, GlaxoSmithKline Australia Managing Director, Mr Paul Lirette said "Only through a comprehensive, long-term partnership between industry, government and the medical research sector can we ensure that the wealth of Australia's intellectual talent continues to be presented with every opportunity to take their research to the world. That's what the GSK Australia Award for Research Excellence is about, a practical demonstration of our long-running support for innovation in research and development in Australia."

Awarded annually in recognition of distinguished discoveries in scientific and medical research that lead to demonstrated or potential benefit to human health, a requirement of the GlaxoSmithKline Award for Research Excellence is that the majority of the research is undertaken in Australia.

Recipients receive an honorarium of \$50,000 to acknowledge their discovery and contribution to science and help further their work. The Award is regarded as one of the most prestigious within the Australian Research Community.

"We are delighted that Associate Professor Little has a track record of ground-breaking discoveries, but of equal importance is the fact that she has established a company to ensure discoveries made here can be commercialized and translated into better outcomes for patients" concluded Mr Lirette.

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