



February 19, 2016

Funding boost for MS research

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of WA (MSWA) has committed almost one million dollars to fund five local researchers for the next two years, in a bid to help find the cause, better treatments and a cure for MS.

“We are acutely aware of how hard it is for researchers to secure funding these days. Initially, we had planned to fund the researchers for one year but when we saw the quality of the work they are doing, we decided to commit to funding them for two years,” said MSWA CEO, Marcus Stafford.

“For us it’s not just about showing our support for local researchers, in the long-term, our aim is to financially support and grow the talent in Western Australia, so that we become the leaders in MS research in Australia.

“MSWA is proud to be the leading funder of MS research in Australia, this year alone we’ve committed \$1.5 million.

“Every piece of research that’s undertaken is a step forward. We don’t have the medication to stop MS but we have ones to slow its progression, so every step is a very important one. We are committed to finding a cure to this condition,” added Mr Stafford.

One of the five leading Western Australian researchers to receive MSWA funding is Dr Marzena Pedrini from the Western Australian Neuroscience Research Institute (WANRI).

“Our research aims to provide better understanding of the MS progression, from the first episode of demyelination to the conversion to MS and then to the benign or aggressive course. Knowing the predictors, biomarkers of specific course will help to tailor the best therapy,” said Dr Pedrini.

“This project will utilise radiological as well as clinical data to predict specific disease sub-types. In this way, we hope to build a detailed profile of MS that can be utilised in disease diagnosis and monitoring,” Dr Pedrini added.

Dr Michelle Byrne, the Head of the Clinical Psychology Unit, Centre for Neuromuscular and Neurological Disorders at UWA was another successful funding recipient. Her research focuses on neuroplasticity and rewiring the brain.

“People with MS have lesions on the brain which have killed the cells. But through cognitive retraining programs there are other areas of the brain that can be recruited to become active and carry out the functions of the brain that are snoozing,” Dr Byrne said.

“There’s a very strong interplay between someone’s physical, emotional and cognitive wellbeing. So if we can help someone improve their memory, information processing or problem solving it will improve their quality of life.”

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The other MSWA research funding recipients are Professor Soumya Ghosh from WANRI and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Anderson Jones from the Telethon Kids Institute and Dr Lucinda Black from Curtin University.

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Successful MSWA research funding applicants

Post Doctorate Research Fellowship Applications

- Dr Marzena Pedrini, Senior Research Officer at WANRI.
Dr Pedrini supports several current and proposed projects “exploring the mechanisms of MS pathogenesis”; HSCT (stem cell) register, UVB therapy in MS and EBV research.
Funded 2016: \$128,138. Funded 2017: \$133,263.
- Anderson Jones, Telethon Kids Institute, Research Officer and Clinical Trial Coordinator
Interested in immunology, allergy and nutrition, Worked on vitamin D and UVB phototherapy MS research. Extending the PhoCIS project looking at the mechanisms by which UV affects the immune system and contributes towards finding a way to stop the progression of MS
Funded 2016: \$97,771. Funded 2017: \$98,658.
- Dr Lucinda Black, Senior Research Officer, Dept. of Nutrition and Dietetics, Curtin University.
Research will explore dietary factors and the risk of MS. Exploring the patterns of food intake, intake of specific foods and nutrients and whether they contribute to the risk of MS.
Funded 2016: \$150,000. Funded 2017: \$150,000

Social and Applied Research Applications

- Prof. Soumya Ghosh, Neurologist AT WANRI and SCGH
Existing project funded through MSRA; this study expands the concept and the eligibility criteria to include progressive MS. Investigating whether the use of non-invasive brain stimulation enhances neuroplasticity thus increasing the effect.
Funded 2015/16: \$13,014. Funded 2016/17: \$26,028
- Dr Michelle Byrne, Head of Clinical Psychology Unit, Centre for Neuromuscular and Neurological Disorders, UWA
Project evaluates the effectiveness of an integrated cognitive and psychosocial rehabilitation programs to facilitate improvements in cognitive and psychosocial development.
Funded 2015/16: \$49,641. Funded 2016/17: \$50,596

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