

Australian
Cancer Research
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qbi
queensland brain institute

MEDIA RELEASE

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World-first stem cell screening facility to target brain tumours

More effective treatments for brain cancer will be developed at a tumour-cell testing facility opened today (Wednesday, March 5) at The University of Queensland's Queensland Brain Institute (QBI).

Funded by a \$1.14 million grant from the Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF), the ACRF Brain Tumour Research Centre was officially opened by Queensland Minister for Health, The Hon. Stephen Robertson, MP.

University of Queensland's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Greenfield, AO, thanked the ACRF for its \$1.14 million donation establishing the centre, acknowledging the Foundation's almost \$8 million in individual grants to University research since 1995.

"The QBI, formed as part of the Queensland Government's Smart State Initiative and building on a long history of neuroscience at The University of Queensland, is the ideal location for this world-first centre" Professor Greenfield said.

QBI Director, Professor Perry Bartlett said despite significant advances in treatments the average life expectancy of patients with aggressive forms of brain cancer was often less than a year.

"This is the first time researchers will be able to isolate, enumerate and purify tumour stem cells with such high levels of efficiency, Professor Bartlett said.

"We know brain cancer occurs in about 10 in every 100,000 people in the Western world. It's a disease that presents in patients of all ages, and is the second-most common tumour type among children and young adults".

ACRF chairman, Tom Dery, said the centre would be the first automated 'high through-put' screening facility designed for testing and identifying stem cells derived from human brain tumours.

"Funding advanced facilities and major equipment, capable of exploring new approaches to achieve better results for cancer patients, is the Foundation's sole focus", Mr Dery said.

Professor Bartlett said there was an emerging view among neuroscientists that cancers in the central nervous system may contain a population of stem cells responsible for tumour initiation and malignancy.

“Until now, one of the prime difficulties in studying these stem cells was that scientists lacked the tools to identify and collect them”, he said.

The new screening facility uses a combination of advanced techniques to record molecular changes in neural stem cell assays.

Scientists from QBI, the Institute for Molecular Bioscience and the Queensland Institute for Medical Research as well as research clinicians from Brisbane’s leading public hospitals will all have access to the ACRF Brain Tumour Research Centre.

The ACRF, a private foundation now in its 24th year of operation, awards grants to leading-edge cancer research programs around Australia.

The Foundation provided funding to Professor Ian Frazer’s cervical cancer vaccine program at a critical period in his research.

“Queensland scientists are among the best in the world and ACRF is proud to have been able to provide almost \$10 million to cancer research in Queensland in the past five years”, Mr Dery said.

“Of our three newest grants, just announced, two have come to Queensland: \$3.2 million to a cancer genomics program led by Professor Frazer and Professor Tom Gonda, at UQ’s Diamantina Institute for Cancer, Immunology and Metabolic Medicine, and \$2.7 million for an Epigenetics Centre at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, led by Professor Emma Whitelaw, a world leader in the field”.

Established in 2003, the QBI is dedicated to understanding the molecular basis of brain function and applying this knowledge to the development of new therapeutics to treat brain and mental health disorders.

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