

REPORT TO THE LIONS CONVENTION
MONASH RHEUMATOLOGY RESEARCH SUPPORT 2014

The Department of Rheumatology at Monash Medical Centre and its associated Research activities in the Centre for Inflammatory Diseases Monash University benefit greatly from the input of the Lions donations to rheumatology research. The Department is excited to be receiving, in 2014, a donation in support of much needed and highly valuable research equipment, that we believe will greatly accelerate our work towards developing new treatments for arthritis and other rheumatic diseases.

Monash Health is the largest health network in Victoria, and serves a catchment equal to the whole of Adelaide or Auckland. The Monash Rheumatology unit continues to grow its services to the region providing high quality public clinical services through running seven weekly clinics at Monash Medical Centre Clayton and Casey Hospital Berwick. Monash Rheumatology also provides inpatient and consulting services at Monash Health campuses. We have continued to grow our junior and senior medical staff in order to serve these growing needs. We are very proud that all services are provided free of out-of-pocket charges to patients.

Ongoing research is essential identify pathways towards cure. Although no rheumatic disease is currently curable, recent breakthroughs worldwide have shown that quality of life can be dramatically improved, and in some cases disease progress completely arrested, with optimum use of research-based therapeutics. Our clinical services are therefore linked closely to research, including basic laboratory research, clinical research, and translational research such as clinical trials. In fact, apart from our two general rheumatology clinics, all of our clinical services are now directly connected to active research programs and are lead by research-active clinicians.

Examples of the success of these clinic-research connections in 2013-14 include:

- Rheumatoid arthritis. A project identifying markers of response to steroid drugs using blood cells donated by patients from this clinic has shown for the first time that a novel protein called 'GILZ' could be a marker for improved steroid-replacement therapies. We have saved material from these same samples for other novel studies currently underway.
- Lupus. Monash has Australia's only dedicated Lupus Clinic, a multidisciplinary team which combines best-practice clinical care with Australia's largest longitudinal data collection and tissue bank, now with over 3500 episodes of care in its database, and this rich data set is beginning to bear fruit. Multiple publications have arisen from this work. This clinic is also the headquarters of an emerging national lupus registry, and has founded a collaboration with AsiaPacific Lupus partners to advance lupus research. Importantly, major collaborations with laboratory researchers arise from the Lupus clinic, supporting discovery research in this disease.

Monash Health does not provide direct support for the research aspects of these clinics, which continue to require funding from donations such as those of the Lions and other charities, as well as national competitive grant funding.

As well as leading the Rheumatology Unit, Professor Eric Morand also leads the Rheumatic Disease research group in the Monash University Centre for Inflammatory Diseases. In 2014 he was appointed to the Editorial Advisory Board of the journal *Nature Reviews Rheumatology*, the highest-ranked journal in the field of arthritis research, as well as to the Board of Directors of the Australian Rheumatology Association. He also serves on several international advisory panels. The Department continues to run clinical trials of new drugs for rheumatoid arthritis and other diseases.

A particular source of pride for the department is its research students. Currently there are three medical students undertaking their Bachelor of Medical Science degree, and a further four rheumatologists undertaking PhD research studies, at Monash. This is, we believe, the largest research student team in any Rheumatology department in Australia.

In my second report as Director of Rheumatology at Monash I can reflect on the benefits to Australian science and Australian patients of the funds that have been generously contributed over the last 25-plus years. The relationship between Monash Rheumatology and the Lions has greatly enhanced rheumatology research in Australia, and thereby continues to enhance the care of patients with these disabling disorders. On behalf of my team I sincerely look forward to an ongoing and fruitful relationship.



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