



20th July 2023

Report on research activities facilitated by Lions Club donations

The Rheumatology research team at Monash are once again extremely grateful for the ongoing support of the Lions Club. Rheumatic diseases of all types continue to cause suffering and loss of quality of life in Australians and we remain dedicated to the goal of using science to improve these outcomes.

As a reminder, past donations from the Lions Club funded the purchase of significant laboratory equipment that remains in regular use. More recently, funding from the Lions Rheumatism and Arthritis Medical Research Foundation Australia supported two PhD students, Iolanda Miceli and Katie Treasure, have been working hard on their projects to understand basic mechanisms of inflammation so that we can devise better treatments in the future. Iolanda is a medical student who has taken a break from her medical studies to complete a full-time research PhD; she will graduate as ‘MD PhD’, joining the ranks of doctors trained as both clinicians and researchers. Iolanda presented her work recently at the Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA) 2023 Annual Scientific Meeting in Hobart where she was invited to speak in the prestigious *New Investigator* session. She was also the recipient of a travel award to attend the Cytokines 2023 International Conference in Athens, Greece later this year.

It has been a busy year with several new staff and students joining our group. Dr Taylah Bennett joined us as post doc in August 2022 after completing her PhD on the role of GILZ in T cells and viral infection and has already made strides forward in her research program, being awarded an Arthritis Australia fellowship. Dr Jian Xin Chow also joined our group as a post doc. She completed her PhD in Hong Kong where she studied inflammatory processes in immune cells in SLE, with a focus on peripheral blood collected from SLE patients. We have also had a new PhD student begin in the lab, Ian (Lily) Cheang, and three honours students.

Our work has continued to focus on the biology of the anti-inflammatory molecule GILZ (glucocorticoid-induced leucine zipper) and we have made significant progress on the long journey to turn science into treatments, working hard to develop ways to make our own compounds that increase GILZ. Excitingly, we recently started our spin out biotech company ‘GilzRx’ co-founded by our lab head Dr Sarah Jones together with clinical head Professor Eric Morand. The goal of GilzRx is to develop of a new anti-inflammatory therapeutic small molecule targeting GILZ, which will reduce reliance on glucocorticoids for the treatment of autoimmune diseases such as lupus.

Recent News stories from the lab Launch of biotech company ‘GilzRx’

Dr Sarah Jones and her team have been awarded \$500,000 from CUREator to support her new biotech GILZRx to run so-called ‘killer’ experiments to show that the development of a new anti-inflammatory therapeutic small molecule will reduce reliance on glucocorticoids for the treatment of autoimmune diseases and inflammatory disorders.

<https://www.monash.edu/medicine/news/latest/2023-articles/success-for-sarah-jones>



Taylah Bennett accepted into The Bridge Program

Dr Taylah Bennett was accepted into the selective Bridge Program 2023 cohort. The Bridge Program selects only 100 participants annually from across Australia to take part in face-to-face and online training in various disciplines that contribute to the commercialisation of new medicines. Taylah will utilise this training in her work to push forward discoveries into the drug development pipeline.

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Premier's Award for Kathryn Connelly

Our very own Dr Kathryn Connelly won the 2023 Victorian Premier's Award. In association with the Australian Society for Medical Research, the Premier's Award celebrates exceptional research and Kathryn's PhD work has earned her Clinical Researcher of the Year.

<https://www.monash.edu/medicine/news/latest/2023-articles/premiers-award-for-kathryn-connelly>



Iolanda Miceli awarded travel grant to attend international conference.

PhD student Iolanda Miceli was awarded a travel grant from the International Cytokine and Interferon Society (ICIS) to attend the *Cytokines 2023 Scientific Meeting* to be held in Athens Greece in October 2023. Iolanda will present her PhD work at the conference, which has significantly contributed to the formation of the labs spin out biotech company 'GiltzRx'.



Monash Sensory Science Exhibition on Autoimmunity

The Monash Sensory Science Exhibit aims to bring accessible science to the low vision and blind community through multi-sensory, multi-modal artworks and exhibits. From handcrafted immune cells made of clay, food, paper and fabrics to technologies and interactives displays exploring autoimmune processes, the exhibit explored ways in which the body mistakenly attacks its own organs and tissues resulting in autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. The lupus team were invited to design an interactive breakout session. We included tactile posters which utilised beads, playdough, recorded push buttons and even crocheting to communicate dysregulation of the immune system in lupus. Some participants who came through our breakout room had lost their vision as a result of their lupus medication, and were interested to hear more about what we work on in the lab to try and find safer therapeutic options for lupus patients.

<https://rossjohnlab.com/monash-sensory-science/>



New Sub-Faculty of Clinical and Molecular Medicine headed by Professor Eric Morand

The new Sub-Faculty of Clinical and Molecular Medicine will include the School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health (SCS), Monash Centre for Health Research Implementation, Victorian Heart Institute and Hudson Institute of Medical Research. The new Sub-Faculty will be headed by Professor Eric Morand as the inaugural Dean.

Professor Morand will work with Professors Stephen Nicholls, Elizabeth Hartland, Helena Teede and the new head of SCS to strengthen ties with Monash Health, and the communities they serve, and with other health services. The Dean will also provide coordinated representation of Monash University's interests, strengths and links to the Monash Technology Precinct, and State and Federal governments

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