

3 March 2011

## Major gift to boost health research at Murdoch

A major gift from the McCusker Charitable Foundation to Murdoch University will support research into the disabling brain disease, multiple sclerosis - and support some of Australia's brightest young scientific minds.

The Foundation has pledged \$900,000 over three years to support the University's Integrated Health Research Institute. Malcolm and Tonya McCusker will present the first instalment of the funding at Murdoch University this Friday, 4 March 2011.

The funding will be used to study multiple sclerosis (MS), which affects around 18,000 people across Australia - and more than 30 people in every 100,000 in Western Australia.

The funding will also support health researchers at the start of their careers who are working across a range of issues including exercise physiology, brain-visual networks, obesity, diabetes, and chronic viral diseases.

Professor Cassandra Berry, Director of the Integrated Health Research Institute, said the multiple sclerosis project, a collaboration with the Australian Neuromuscular Research Institute, would look at a range of factors that could increase people's risk of developing the disease.

"This is a really exciting collaborative project which will hopefully lead to new diagnostic and treatment methods. More people are now developing the disease than 30 years ago. The aim is to be able to predict progression to multiple sclerosis earlier in life," she said.

"There are a number of theories which will be tested under the project. For example, it is thought that if you first contract glandular fever - commonly known as the 'kissing disease' - as an adolescent, this might increase your risk of developing MS. Low exposure to sunlight in early life may also be a factor, and genetics have a role to play."

A multi-disciplinary team of scientists and clinicians will work with a group of around 1,000 MS patients in WA on the project.

The remainder of the funding will be used to help develop a number of early career researchers at the Integrated Health Research Institute.

Professor Berry said: "This funding will help them with international collaborations, the costs of travelling to conferences to share their work with wider audiences, equipment and professional development - all of which will help them get their careers off to the best possible start.

"We also want them to be ambassadors for science to the younger generation, and to encourage young people to consider making a career in discovery."

Professor John Yovich, Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University, said: "We are enormously grateful to the McCusker Foundation for this generous donation.



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# Media Announcement

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"We are hopeful that the multiple sclerosis research project will make a real difference to those affected by this disease and we are particularly grateful for the contribution towards research staff funding, as it is these young scientists who are our greatest resource."

The McCusker Foundation already supports Murdoch University in a number of ways. It contributed \$500,000 towards the Institute for Immunology and Infectious Diseases' Genesis Campaign. Donations have also been given to support annual mooted competitions in the Law School and the Banksia Association Scholarship.

## Editor's notes

Reporters and photographers are welcome to attend the presentation at 9am on Friday 4 March at Murdoch University. Please notify Val McFarlane (contact details below) no later than 4pm on Thursday 3 March if you wish to attend.

Interviews with those involved can also be arranged – please contact Val McFarlane.

The McCusker Charitable Foundation (<http://www.mccuskercharitable.com.au/>) was established for charitable purposes aimed at improving health and education, with particular emphasis on Western Australia. It gives priority to projects related to medical research and advancement of medical science; care, welfare and education of young people; promotion of high achievement and excellence; support for the aged and infirm; arts and environment.

The Integrated Health Research Institute at Murdoch University, through the integration of fundamental and applied health research, aims to discover knowledge of significant benefit to Australia's present and future healthcare needs. The strategic focus on issues of core importance to health is interdisciplinary in nature, and brings together the recognised strengths of Murdoch University researchers in Biomedicine, Psychology, Nursing, Pharmacy and Chiropractic, creating a world-class health research organisation.

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