

Media Release

Philanthropy commits more than \$1million to Australian biomedical research

Ramaciotti Foundations recognise ground-breaking discovery in leukaemia treatment

20 October 2020

Perpetual, as trustee of the Clive and Vera Ramaciotti Foundations, has announced the 2020 recipients of the Ramaciotti Awards for Biomedical Research. This year more than \$1 million is being distributed to nine biomedical researchers, coinciding with the Foundations' 50th anniversary.

The Awards include the **Ramaciotti Medal for Excellence**, an annual award of \$50,000, provided to a researcher who has made an outstanding discovery in clinical or experimental biomedical research. This year, the honour has been jointly awarded to Professor Andrew Roberts and Professor John Seymour, for their roles in researching and conducting clinical trials for a breakthrough anti-cancer drug Venetoclax, that is benefiting patients across the world who have chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL). Both work at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the University of Melbourne, and Professor Roberts conducts research at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research.

Notably, the professors were leaders in the clinical trials of a new class of drug that targets chemotherapy-resistant leukaemia. It has subsequently received TGA and FDA approvals for the Australian and US markets respectively and is now routinely used in patient care. Currently, there are more than 200 studies globally to further explore the potential of the drug to treat other cancers, in combination with existing treatments. Their research and clinical work have contributed to clinicians' understanding of how this therapy can address difficult-to-treat blood cancers. Many thousands of patients across the world have already benefited from this ground-breaking treatment.

Of his receipt of the Ramaciotti Medal of Excellence, Professor Roberts said: "The most rewarding aspect of our research is seeing the patients who are benefiting from having this drug available. The support of the Ramaciotti Awards to further our research is wonderful".

Joint recipient, Professor Seymour added, "Venetoclax has a distinctly Melbourne story – from basic research to clinical trials all conducted or led from here – and so this award for excellence also speaks to the world-class people and capability within this city, and the strength of collaboration in the Parkville biomedical precinct.

"Andrew and I deeply thank the Ramaciotti Foundations for this recognition, and we look forward to what's possible in the next exciting phase of this research which is having a global impact in blood cancer."

As part of the Awards, the **Ramaciotti Health Investment Grants** have allocated up to \$150,000 for each of seven recipients across Australia, to support their progress in taking their research to clinical application within five years (see full list of recipients below.)

This year, the **Derek Hart Memorial Award** was awarded to Health Investment Grant recipient, Dr Rona Chandrawati from the University of New South Wales. This Award honours the late Derek Hart’s contributions to medical research and his long association with the Ramaciotti Foundation’s Scientific Advisory Committee, including as Chair from 2012-2017.

The Ramaciotti Foundations are collectively one of the largest private contributors to biomedical research in Australia and this year are celebrating their 50th anniversary, having granted over \$62.5 million to research projects since 1970. This has included support for internationally renowned discoveries such as the world’s first cervical cancer vaccines and the Cochlear implant.

Commenting on the significance of the milestone, Perpetual’s Managing Partner, Community and Social Investments, Caitriona Fay, said: “We are proud to continue the legacy of Clive and Vera Ramaciotti, 50 years after they established the Foundations to support Australia’s biomedical community. The impact of their initial investment and vision has been enduring and demonstrates that when philanthropy invests in bold ideas, we can significantly improve the wellbeing and health of millions of people worldwide”.

– Ends –

FULL LIST OF AWARD/GRANT RECIPIENTS

2020 Ramaciotti Medal for Excellence (joint recipients)

Researcher	Institution	Field of work	Media enquiries
Professor Andrew Roberts	The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute	Developing a break-through anti-cancer drug that is benefiting patients worldwide who are suffering from chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL)	Samantha Robin 0400 175 355 robin.s@wehi.edu.au
Professor John Seymour	The Peter McCallum Cancer Centre		Danny Rose 0417 123 048 Danny.Rose@petermac.org

2020 Ramaciotti Health Investment Grants recipients:

Researcher	Institution	Project Title	Media enquiries
A/Professor Adam Deane	Melbourne Health	A learning healthcare system to improve outcomes from intensive care and hospital	Melea Tarabay 0407 860 687 melea.tarabay@mh.org.au
Dr Amy Keir	South Australian	Using donor human milk to improve outcomes for	Pete McDonald 0402 293 078

	Health and Medical Research Institute	moderate-late preterm infants and their families	pete.mcdonald@sahmri.com
Dr Davis McCarthy	St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research	Faster, cheaper, more accurate breast cancer screening: training computers to detect disease	Lisa Kuspira 0423 011 493 lkuspira@svi.edu.au
Dr Rona Chandrawati (and Derek Hart Memorial Award recipient)	University of New South Wales	Preventing vision loss in glaucoma through nitric-oxide-eluting stents.	Lisa Williams 0416 080 866 lisa.williams@unsw.edu.au
Dr Lining Arnold Ju	The University of Sydney	Bioengineering state-of-the-art biochips towards cardiovascular point-of-care testing	Luisa Low 0438 021 390 luisa.low@sydney.edu.au
A/Prof Natasha Rogers	Western Sydney Local Health District	A novel strategy to improve insulin secretion and islet transplant outcomes in diabetes mellitus	Kylie Ironside (02) 8627 3030 kylie.ironside@sydney.edu.au
Dr James Wilmott	Melanoma Institute Australia	Precision Immunotherapy Platform to match novel drug immunotherapy combinations with advanced cancer patients (PIP-MATCH)	Jennifer Durante 0412 798 990 media@melanoma.org.au

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About the Ramaciotti Foundations

Managed by Perpetual, the Ramaciotti Foundations started off with \$6.7 million in funds in 1970 with the first major grant going to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in 1971. This assisted with the establishment of the new Clive and Vera Ramaciotti Research Laboratories building. Since then, the Foundations have donated over \$62.5 million to biomedical research and are one of the largest private contributors to the field. The Ramaciotti Foundations continue to support biomedical research and each year make significant distributions via the Ramaciotti Awards, providing funding support to areas such as molecular biology, genetics and immunology, and assisting young investigators taking up new challenges in biomedical research.

For more information about the Ramaciotti Foundations visit www.perpetual.com.au/ramaciotti

About the Ramaciotti Medal for Excellence in Biomedical Research

The Ramaciotti Medal is an annual award of \$50,000. The Medal honours an individual who has made an outstanding discovery (or discoveries) in clinical or experimental biomedical research that has had an important impact on biomedical science, clinical science, or the way in which healthcare is delivered. To be eligible for the Ramaciotti Medal, the greater part of the nominee's work leading to the discovery (or discoveries) must have been conducted in Australia and they must still be actively engaged in this work. The applicant must be peer nominated and the final recipient is selected based on a recommendation by the Ramaciotti Scientific Advisory Committee to Perpetual. Recent recipients include Professor Susan Clarke, Professor Jane Visvader & Professor Geoff Lindeman, Professor Carola Vinuesa, and Professor David Craik. Professor Tim Hughes was the 2019 recipient.

About the Ramaciotti Health Investment Grants

Ramaciotti Health Investment grants of up to \$150,000 are awarded to individuals in universities, public hospitals or institutes for a contribution towards the undertaking of health or medical research with the potential path to clinical application within five years. A Health Investment grant is intended to provide enabling research support for an autonomous early career investigator who is taking, or has recently taken, a substantive position. Grants are awarded by Perpetual, Trustee of the Foundations, on the recommendation of a dedicated Scientific Advisory Committee.

About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

Perpetual is one of Australia's largest managers and distributors of philanthropic funds with \$2.9 billion in funds under advice for charitable trusts and endowment funds (as at 30 June 2020). Perpetual is trustee for many charitable trusts and endowments and provides individuals and families with advice on establishing charitable foundations and structured giving programs. Perpetual also assists charities and not-for-profit organisations with investment advice and management.

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