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news

Mark Hughes Foundation awards innovation in brain cancer research

Five highly innovative brain cancer research projects have received more than \$725,000 in funding from the Mark Hughes Foundation (MHF) following a nationwide call-out and scientific review by experts in the field.

The recipients were revealed at Sydney's Kolling Institute today, with guests including NRL Chief Executive Todd Greenberg, the Callander family and representatives of Channel Nine and Fox Sports, to recognise rugby league's support for the 2018 MHF Beanie Round.

MHF co-founder Mark Hughes said the aim of the inaugural Brain Cancer Innovation Project Grant Rounds, to be conducted over the next one to two years, is to solve the riddle of brain cancer.

"We wanted to award funding to big thinkers who could knuckle down and tackle this insidious disease," Mark Hughes said.

"We would like to acknowledge the NRL for embracing the Beanie for Brain Cancer campaign and the support of all involved that has made this happen.

"\$5 million has been raised over the last two years during the NRL Round which is a huge factor in these grants being awarded today."

NRL Chief Executive Todd Greenberg said announcements like this make the immense support for Beanie Round all the worthwhile.

"These innovation grants to help find a cure for brain cancer would not have been possible without the generous support of the rugby league family over the past few years," Mr Greenberg said.

"I look forward to the game getting behind Beanie for Brain Cancer once again in Round 19 this season, as much as we look forward to hopefully finding a cure for this hideous disease in the very near future."

The five recipients of the Innovation grants, presented by Anne Callander, the wife of the late executive producer of Channel Nine Matt Callander, were as follows:

- Professor Hubert Hondermarck, from HMRI and the University of Newcastle, will receive almost \$150,000 to explore a novel form of cancer research known as cancer neurobiology. He and his team will build on their work exploring the role of neurons in prostate, breast and thyroid cancers and transfer their knowledge to glioblastoma – a unique brain cancer. Patient survival rates for glioblastoma have been stagnant, highlighting the need for new thinking.
- Dr Julius Woongki Kim from the Children’s Medical Research Institute in Sydney who is working on a novel treatment approach to high grade glioma (HGG) – the most aggressive form of brain tumour. The team will bioengineer Dendritic Cells, which are part of the normal immune system and work to ‘patrol the body and identify abnormally-acting cells’.
- Dr Fatemeh Vafaei, from the University of New South Wales, and her team will harness the power of artificial intelligence and cutting-edge computational modelling to identify patterns of change in gene activities in patients with glioblastoma. The aim is to identify any signifiers pointing to tumour recurrence to optimise quality of life and survival.
- Dr Jonathan Goodwin from Calvary Mater Newcastle and his team are exploring glucose metabolism in head and neck cancer patients using a novel magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) based approach. This project aims to accurately and non-invasively measure glucose measurement in brain cancer to allow greater insight into the treatment process and to have a significant impact on cancer staging.
- HMRI cancer researcher Dr Michael Fay, a MHF Mid-Career Fellow, and team are aiming to identify new targets and treatments for recurrent glioblastoma to prolong survival of patients. A specific protein found in prostate cancer cells, PSMA, is also found in glioblastoma cells and the team are exploring drugs to target PSMA as a new treatment option.

The focus for each project is innovation and collaboration, particularly with research teams at HMRI and the Brain Cancer Group.

The 2019 NRL Beanie for Brain Cancer Round will take place in Round 19 of the NRL Telstra Premiership between 25 – 28 July this year, with the new MHF beanies launching 1 June.

All money raised during the Beanie for Brain Cancer Round goes directly to brain cancer research and patient support.