

Grant funds bold vision to beat cancer

By Kylie Stevens
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Ground breaking: Facility manager Valentina Valova and Children's Medical Research Institute's Professor Phil Robinson hope the ProCan will be set up by September. Picture: Michael Szabath

A \$10 million grant will help develop the first cancer research clinic of its kind in the world at Westmead.

One of the largest private grants for medical research equipment in Australia's history, given by the Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF) will establish The ACRF International Centre for the Proteome of Cancer (ProCan) at Children's Medical Research Institute.

Cancer Institute NSW contributed an additional \$500,000.

In the next seven years, research institute scientists will work with leading researchers to analyse 70,000 examples of all types of cancer from around the world to develop a bank of information that will advance scientific discovery and enhance clinical treatment worldwide.

New technology called PCT-SWATH mass spectrometry will be used to measure the precise levels of many thousands of proteins in small cancer biopsies.

The centre will be led by institute professors Phil Robinson and Roger Reddel.

"The ACRF was offering grants and asked for a bold new vision for cancer research," Professor Robinson said.

"It's incredibly exciting and a honour that they've put this huge trust in us.

"All of my training has come to fruition."

Professor Reddel said ProCan would be a major step forward for cancer diagnosis and treatment.

"The end result will be rapid and more accurate prediction of the best cancer treatments for each individual patient."

The facility will be up and running later this year.

"The project has moved faster than anything I've been involved with," Professor Robinson said.

"The grant was announced on December 9 and most of the equipment had arrived by December 29 and by January 2, was waiting to be set up.

"We'll start off with seven scientists but longer term, we'll be looking at a team of 12 to 15."

Additional funding is needed to achieve phase two of the project.

Advanced computer analysis techniques will be used to compare protein data with the information already available for each cancer, including genetic analyses, pathology test results, and any previous responses to cancer treatment.

"It will give patients and their physicians treatment options they've never had before," Professor Robinson said.