



## Uniting the world for a cure

**Our efforts to end melanoma are spanning the globe. As our supporters set their sights on conquering the Great Wall of China to raise vital funds for research (see page 2), melanoma experts from around the world are preparing to unite in Sydney for the Australasian Melanoma Conference.**

Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) is hosting the conference which will bring together some of the greatest minds in melanoma research to showcase current practice and research innovation that will make a difference to the lives of melanoma patients. With presentations from oncologists, surgeons, pathologists, dermatologists and laboratory researchers, the conference will focus on

the multidisciplinary management of melanoma.

Now that we have a number of therapies for treating advanced melanoma, research is focussing on how to improve patient response and understanding why some tumours develop resistance. Keynote speaker Associate Professor Jennifer Wargo from Harvard and MD Anderson Cancer Center will discuss her research on how the genes of gut flora – known as the microbiome – play a role in determining how well a patient responds to treatment.

“There is emerging evidence regarding the role of the microbiome in response to melanoma therapy, and it is quite likely that we will modify the microbiome to enhance responses to therapy in the upcoming months and years,” says A/Prof Wargo. “I am looking forward to meeting with my global colleagues in melanoma therapy to understand recent advances and to work as a team

to strategically plan next steps in advancing the field.”

Advances in diagnosing melanoma, melanoma in children, preventing melanoma and surgical advances are just some of the other areas of research that will be presented at the conference.

In July, researchers and clinicians from MIA presented their findings at the 2016 ASCO Annual Meeting in Chicago – the largest oncology conference in the world. Data presented at the conference continued to showcase advances, in particular revealing some impressive long-term survival data from clinical trials. However, there are still many challenges that we need to investigate, such as overcoming resistance, finding out which patients are likely to respond to which therapies and understanding which combinations and order of therapies works best.



Latest research developments will feature at the upcoming Australasian Melanoma Conference.



A/Prof Jennifer Wargo will be a keynote speaker at the conference.



MIA presented research at ASCO in Chicago, the world's largest oncology conference.



MIA's Prof Georgina Long presenting at ASCO 2016.



## Ready to Move for Melanoma?

MIA's annual awareness and fundraising initiative, Melanoma March, is embarking on a new initiative in 2017... *Move for Melanoma*.

We can't hold a Melanoma March in every location around Australia, but that doesn't mean you can't *Move for Melanoma* anywhere in the world to unite against

melanoma and raise awareness and funds for research.

You can *Move for Melanoma* by organising your own local mini march, group activity or personal challenge to get moving in March. You can even track your progress online using the new Fitbit integration on your fundraising page.

Melanoma March is your chance to **remember** those lost to melanoma, **support** our dedicated researchers and **inspire** all Australians to help end melanoma.

By participating in one of our 17 national Melanoma March events or by organising your own activity to *Move for Melanoma*, you will be supporting vital research. Will you help end melanoma?

Visit [melanomamarch.org.au](http://melanomamarch.org.au) to find out more.

MIA's Community Co-ordinator and melanoma survivor, Jay Allen, will be walking from Brisbane to Sydney as his Longest Melanoma March. Over 29 days, Jay will walk 1200km to raise awareness of melanoma and funds for a cure.

## Learning from the best in the world

A generous donation has enabled a medical oncologist from Portugal to learn from the best in the world at MIA.

Dr Inês Silva is our new Medical Oncology Fellow who recently arrived from Lisbon, Portugal, and will work under the guidance of Professor Georgina Long. Inês completed her training in general oncology in Lisbon and undertook a PhD at New York University where she spent three years working on immunotherapies for melanoma patients.

"I arrived in New York in 2010, when immunotherapies were just starting to take off in melanoma treatment," says Inês. "It was an exciting time to see the difference it was making to patients."

Inês returned to Portugal but decided she wanted more experience in treating melanoma and applied for our Fellowship program.

"Unlike Australia, we don't have a lot of melanoma in Portugal and no-one really specialises in it. I wanted to understand more about this disease and gain experience in clinical trials, translational research and tumour banking. I also was very keen to work with Professor Long," says Inês.

In addition to treating patients at MIA, Inês will undertake research to find out why some patients develop resistance to anti-PD-1 immunotherapies.

"I'm interested in predictive markers of response and prognosis. I aim to stratify patients to ensure that each patient receives the best possible treatment. We also need to work out which is the optimal sequencing of therapies for patients," she says. "This research will benefit melanoma patients around the world."

After completing her Fellowship at MIA, Inês plans to take her knowledge back to her home country and implement a similar set-up in Portugal to ensure that melanoma patients there have access to the best possible treatment.

Funding for the Medical Oncology Fellowship was provided by James Economides and the team at Red Property who generously donated their commission from the recent sale of a property owned by our patron, Mr Greg Poche AO.

Introducing our Medical Oncology Fellow, Dr Inês Silva.



## Trek the Great Wall for MIA

Has the Great Wall of China always been on your bucket list?

Join MIA for the adventure of a lifetime and raise funds for life-saving melanoma research. We have teamed up with Inspired Adventures to bring you the Great Wall of China Trek 2017.

Experience the wonders of the Great Wall of China and Beijing on our 11-day organised tour with other like-minded MIA supporters. You will challenge yourself like never before as you trek on remote and unrestored paths, between mountains, through local villages and across rolling farmlands.

The trek will be held 11 to 21 September 2017.

This is an unforgettable experience for an incredible cause and we hope you can join us.

For more information, visit [melanoma.org.au](http://melanoma.org.au).



## Partnering to cure melanoma

MIA's Platinum Partner Ricky Richards is paving the way to a future where no one dies from melanoma through its corporate social responsibility initiative.

In July 2015, national textiles supplier Ricky Richards decided to donate a percentage of sales from various sun protection product lines directly to MIA's research and education programs. In the first year of their partnership with MIA, they exceeded their own target by raising \$102,668 to fund a Fellowship at MIA.

Ricky Richards Director, Ron Gottlieb, said the fit for the partnership between Ricky Richards and MIA made a lot of sense. "With a large part of our business involved in the promotion of high quality sun protection products it seemed logical to us to support melanoma research," he said. "We wanted to support an organisation where we believe we can make a difference, and we are looking forward to growing our relationship with the Institute over the coming years."

Ricky Richards is setting a great example and we can only express our gratitude for their vision and generosity.

## Research Update

Professor Graham Mann, Research Director

The massive ASCO conference, held in June in Chicago, highlighted the progress that has been made with immune and targeted treatments for metastatic melanoma. For people treated in the early trials, with either anti-PD1 or combination anti-BRAF-MEK drugs, more than 40% have survived beyond three years compared with fewer than 5% in the not-so-distant past. While this is enormously encouraging, our research continues to focus on how to overcome the resistance that the other 60% of melanomas show.

In August we celebrated the win by Dr James Wilmott of a NSW Premier's Award for Outstanding Cancer Research for a paper that attracted rapid, high-level attention from the research community. The award recognised the practical importance of his study which showed that a simple antibody test could be a quick option to discover if a tumour carried a BRAF mutation and would therefore likely respond to targeted treatment.

The melanoma High Risk Clinic study continues to kick goals. In addition to showing its approach is more effective than usual care for monitoring people at very high risk of melanoma (see below story), recent PhD graduate Dr Mbathio Dieng will report soon about how direct psychological support is effective in reducing the anxiety that high melanoma risk causes so many people.

Funding from Melanoma March 2015 has enabled the awarding of a contract to develop a melanoma PDX cell bank (AXMAP) at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute over the next three years, led by Dr Mark Shackleton. PDX cells preserve the characteristics of the original tumour. Once developed, the cells will be used by researchers all around Australia to help find more effective therapies for melanoma patients.

Proceeds from Melanoma March 2016 are to be used to establish a data network among Australian centres treating melanoma, large and small. This Big Data for Melanoma network aims to build a picture of melanoma care in real time across the country, as a platform for enhancing research and producing positive change in care.



## Carole's Column

**It's now seven months since I started with MIA. What a lot I have learnt in this time! We've got quite a few very exciting things on the horizon between now and early 2017 which you'll read about in this issue.**

I'm pleased to share that following grants from Tour de Cure and the Coca-Cola Australia Foundation, we've developed a simple but compelling sun safety workshop for both primary and high schools. The grants specifically require us to target schools in areas where melanoma incidence is high and to reach 150 of these schools by June 2017.

I'm excited to announce that we'll be hosting the inaugural Australasian Melanoma Conference this October. With 200 registered to attend and still counting, this promises to be the absolute Melanoma Masterclass for GPs, specialists, nurses, medical students, dermatologists and more. We'll be aiming to capture some great content in lay terms to share with our supporters.

We've also launched a new fundraising initiative, our very

first Charity Challenge with Inspired Adventures. Charity Challenges are a great way to do good while having a fantastic adventure experience. I can't wait for this first one to China to go well, because there are so many more wonderful trips in store!

Our new initiative, Move for Melanoma, is a great addition to our Melanoma March campaign. I'm looking forward to welcoming Jay Allen into Sydney after his 1200 km walk.

And finally, as I continue to meet and get to know our supporters – those who give in cash and those who give in kind, or both – I am humbled both the quality and quantity of help we receive from the community. Thank you most sincerely for supporting us.

**Carole Renouf**  
CEO  
Melanoma Institute Australia

## MIA research spotlight: High Risk Clinic

**Early detection of melanoma is crucial for saving lives and current guidelines advise "regular monitoring" to ensure melanoma is caught early. However, until now, it had not been proven how often this should be done or what the costs and benefits would actually be in practice.**

Researchers at MIA established a High Risk Clinic to monitor people at very high risk of developing melanoma. This specialised surveillance clinic examines people every six months, photographs and maps their moles via total body photography, and uses close-up sequential digital photography to observe any changes over time.

"Monitoring of changing moles is time consuming and requires highly trained staff and specific resources," says MIA's Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Caroline Watts.

"But our research has showed that for these people who develop many melanomas, close monitoring actually would save more than \$6,800 per patient over 10 years. Fewer suspicious moles would be unnecessarily cut out, and the early detection of melanomas would mean less extensive surgery would be required," she said.

The research, published recently in the prestigious *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, will likely to lead to calls for new rebates in the Medicare Benefits Scheme to support access to clinics that can offer



this form of regular monitoring by total body and close-up digital imaging.

"This is a disciplined, low tech but expert procedure that can and should be implemented by the Australian health care system," said Professor Graham Mann, Research Director at MIA and a Chief Investigator of the High Risk Clinic project. "It would save more lives and help reduce the costs of melanoma detection and treatment."



Students at Cardiff Public School demonstrate the five ways to protect themselves from the sun.

## Educating our next generation

Teaching the community about melanoma is a high priority for MIA. Just one bad sunburn at a young age can increase the risk of developing melanoma significantly in the future. That means education and sun safety must start early.

Thanks to support from Tour de Cure and Coca-Cola Australia Foundation, MIA has developed a Sun Safe Workshop aimed to educate primary and high school students in 27 melanoma hotspots across regional and rural NSW.

By the end of the year, our presenters will have spoken to almost 10,000 students across 75 schools.

The interactive presentation teaches about sun safety as well and educates students about the dangers of melanoma, and the best methods for prevention and early detection. It has been well received by students and teachers alike.

## Upcoming events

**The Australasian Melanoma Conference (Sydney)** – 28 to 29 October

**Illawarra Golf Day (NSW)** – 18 November

**The Sunday Age City2Sea (Melbourne)** – 20 November

**Melanoma March (National)** – 26 February to 2 April

Visit our website ([melanoma.org.au](http://melanoma.org.au)) or contact us to find out more about these upcoming events. If you are interested in holding your own event, please contact us on [info@melanoma.org.au](mailto:info@melanoma.org.au).

## Dermatology services at MIA

MIA's dermatology services have recently expanded to include five specialist dermatologists consulting from our newly renovated suites on level 3 of The Poche Centre.

Our areas of expertise include diagnosing difficult melanocytic lesions and managing cutaneous side effects of therapies for advanced melanoma. We also have state-of-the-art non-invasive technology to aid diagnosis. Phone 02 9911 7277 or email [dermatology@melanoma.org.au](mailto:dermatology@melanoma.org.au) to make an appointment.



## Running for a cure

The melanoma community once again united to run for a cure in this year's City2Surf!

Almost \$44,000 was raised by Team Melanoma – a group of 45 passionate people who have all been touched by melanoma in some way. We are so grateful for their support and dedication.



*"It's nice to know that I can – in a small way – play a role in helping future melanoma patients."*

## A Day in the Life of... Michelle Peranec

Patient blood and tissue samples underpin much of our research at MIA. Working as a Translational Research Officer, **Michelle Peranec's** role is to connect the clinics at The Poche Centre to the laboratory by ensuring patient blood samples are documented and carefully stored in our BioSpecimen Bank for use in vital research.

**9am:** I start my day by going through the patient lists to see who is visiting their oncologist today. I decide which patients I'm interested in for our research based on their type of melanoma, what treatment they are receiving and how they are responding.

**10am:** I head to the clinics where I approach the patients and ask if they'd like to donate blood to our BioSpecimen Bank. This is my favourite part of my day as I get to meet the patients and get a glimpse into their journey. Once patients have consented, I arrange for their blood sample to be taken.

**1pm:** By the afternoon, I have a collection of blood samples. I help my colleague in the lab process them and ensure the paperwork is accurate.

**3pm:** Researchers from outside MIA also request samples from our BioSpecimen Bank, so I go through our frozen samples and send some to collaborators for their own melanoma research.

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