$2.4 million funding boost for arthritis, stroke and MS research at Menzies

Tasmanian research into knee osteoarthritis, stroke and multiple sclerosis has received a major boost with the announcement of more than $2.4 million in funds for projects at the University of Tasmania’s Menzies Institute for Medical Research.

Three projects were successful in bidding for the highly competitive National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 2017 project funding. Work on the projects will begin next year.

The Menzies Director, Professor Alison Venn, said the three grants reflected the breadth of research taking place at Menzies. “We focus on research that will have a significant benefit for the Tasmanian community, and beyond. These projects have the potential to make a difference in the lives of thousands of people.

“The depth of our research in these three areas has increased over time, with the support of the Tasmanian community, and we can now make further inroads into understanding and treating these three health problems.

“These three projects reflect our drive for research that is innovative and focused on impact in the community.”

The three new projects are:

- $1,309,503 for a randomised controlled trial of the anti-inflammatory drug diacerein to treat knee osteoarthritis. Almost 60% of people with knee osteoarthritis have joint inflammation and are likely to experience pain and rapid destruction in the joint. This multi-centre clinical trial, led by Menzies’ Dr Dawn Aitken, will test whether diacerein reduces pain and joint damage in patients with inflammatory knee osteoarthritis. The drug is registered in some European and Asian countries and the trial will help determine whether it becomes available in Australia.

- $664,868 for investigation of non-invasive magnetic stimulation to promote re-insulation in the brain. Research led by Dr Kaylene Young at Menzies has identified a non-invasive method of magnetic stimulation that increases the number of new insulating cells added to the brain. The new project will determine whether this new treatment can promote insulation repair in a preclinical model of multiple sclerosis.
This funding will further strengthen the large and integrated program of laboratory, clinical and population health research that continues 20 years of expertise in multiple sclerosis at Menzies.

- $436,022 for reducing delays in treatment of aneurysmal subarachnoid haemorrhage (aSAH), a rare but devastating form of stroke that kills at least 30 per cent of sufferers within one month. This project, led by Menzies epidemiologist Dr Seana Gall, will determine the optimal times for treatment to increase discharge home, reduce complications and improve survival for people who have suffered this type of stroke.

The new funds follow an announcement in October that Menzies will also receive $637,536 from the NHMRC for research fellowships in multiple sclerosis and health economics.

*Caption: Dr Seana Gall, Dr Dawn Aitken and Dr Kaylene Young have all been granted funding for new medical research projects at Menzies. Photo: Peter Mathew.*

*Short video clips of each researcher talking about their project are available on request.*

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