FNI TO LEAD IN CUTTING-EDGE BIOMEDICAL IMAGING CAPABILITY

The Florey Neuroscience Institutes will lead the Victorian Biomedical Imaging Capability (VBIC) project in collaboration with funding partners, Monash University, the University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the CSIRO after a recent announcement by the Victorian government to contribute $8.5 million towards the project.

Innovation Minister, Gavin Jennings recently visited the construction site of the new Melbourne Brain Centre in Parkville where he stated that the Government’s funding would vastly improve biomedical imaging for the state.

“The VBIC will provide a coordinated network of capabilities and research capacity in medical imaging to support Victoria’s universities and medical institutes to conduct research that has the potential to save the lives of people around the world,” Mr Jennings said.

“Our $8.5M investment will enable the VBIC project to acquire cutting-edge equipment for researchers to explore major diseases and degenerative conditions that increasingly affect people world-wide.”

Mr Jennings said the VBIC project will increase capability in cognitive and clinical neurosciences research at the Florey and our supporting institutes.

“Biomedicine is a major component of Victoria’s innovation-economy and biomedical imaging is a fundamental platform for supporting this sector. These investments will ensure the partner organisations retain and attract the world’s best researchers and clinicians,” Mr Jennings said.

Professor Donnan, FNI Director, said “We are delighted that the state government has committed these funds to the further development of the imaging capacity in Victoria. The rapid advancements being made in medical imaging warrants this sizable investment, and we commend the government on its foresight.”
DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE
DEAR FRIENDS, THERE HAS BEEN A REAL BUZZ OF EXCITEMENT HERE AT THE FLOREY DURING THE LAST QUARTER. MANY OF YOU WOULD HAVE ATTENDED THE RECENT KENNETH MYER LECTURE WHERE PROFESSOR TIM BLISS SHARED WITH US HIS EXTENSIVE RESEARCH INTO THE ‘MACHINERY OF MEMORY’. MORE THAN 1,600 PEOPLE ATTENDED THIS YEAR’S EVENT.

Coinciding with Professor Bliss’ visit, FNI organised and co-hosted the Melbourne Brain Symposium. The sold-out conference focused on neural plasticity and the latest advancements in translational neuroscience. This type of scientific gathering is crucial to the ongoing learning and collaboration of researchers across the country.

In further good news for our imaging capacity the Victorian government has committed $8.55 million through FNI and a group of partners, to upgrade our 3T, 4.7T and PET imaging equipment at our Austin and Parkville facilities.

The building projects at Parkville and Austin are progressing well. Parkville remains substantially ahead of schedule and we currently expect completion in mid-2011, with relocation and opening later in the year.

The Austin facility is being fitted-out and staff will begin occupying the building in the first quarter of 2011. We are looking forward to an official opening sometime in the second half of the year.

A number of FNI staff have recently attracted news headlines. Professor Malcolm Horne, one of FNI’s most distinguished scientists gave an extensive interview for the ‘Higher Age’ section of The Age. A/Professor David Howells featured on ABC News regarding new findings in stroke and Mr Simon McKeon, Chairman of the CSIRO, and I were interviewed by Channel Nine News at the launch of the START/EXTEND program.

Finally, I would like to thank Lina Marrocco from Charityworks for MS and her organising committee for their amazing gala evening Diamonds, which raised an astonishing $214,560 for multiple sclerosis research and care. The dedication of Lina and her team is inspiring to all the researchers at FNI.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all an enjoyable summer vacation and I look forward to 2011 being one of the most significant in FNI’s history as we move into our state of the art facilities across two campuses.

Prof Geoffrey Donnan, Director, Florey Neuroscience Institutes

BRAIN FITNESS CHALLENGE WELCOMES PREMIER PARTNER

Wendy Brooks and Steven Marsh from The Trust Company visited FNI recently to present a cheque for $25,000 to FNI’s Jenni Elliott and Christine Corbett.

This generous grant from the Fred P Archer Trust has contributed to the development of the Brain Fitness Challenge, a unique 7-day online competition that aims to raise funds for brain research and promotes the concept that “brain exercise + physical exercise + a nutritionally balanced diet = a healthy lifestyle”.

FNI is delighted to welcome The Trust Company as its Premier Partner in the Brain Fitness Challenge.

L-R. Jenni Elliot, Steven Marsh (back), Wendy Brooks, Christine Corbett
HUGE AUDIENCE FOR KENNETH MYER LECTURE

The 14th Kenneth Myer Lecture, held recently at the Melbourne Convention Centre, attracted a record audience of more than 1,600 people. Giving the lecture was world-renowned neuroscientist Professor Tim Bliss, previously head of the Department of Physiology, National Institute of Medical Research, Mill Hill, London.

Professor Bliss was born in England and gained his PhD at McGill University in Canada. His early work with Terje Lømo at the University of Oslo in the late 1960’s established the phenomenon of long-term potentiation (LTP) as the dominant synaptic model of how the mammalian brain stores memories. As changes in LTP are seen in addiction and in neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease, understanding these basic synaptic properties can give insight into other disease processes.

In his presentation, Professor Bliss touched on the understanding of cellular mechanisms and how they work with our memories, memory enhancing drugs for the treatment of memory disorders, and how recent experiments have led to our current understanding of the molecular machinery of memory.

Each year, FNI awards a prestigious medal and accompanying lecture to a distinguished scientist selected by the Director and Executive Committee to promote science to the Australian public. The award and lecture is named after Kenneth Myer, who was one of the founding benefactors of the Howard Florey Institute, and the lecture series was endowed in his memory. In its fifteen year history, the lecture has been given by five Nobel laureates.

FAMILY CONNECTION TO BRAIN CONDITIONS PROMPTS GENEROUS SUPPORT

Ralph Stavely a retired policeman, and his wife Maureen nursed her mother who suffered a series of strokes before she died. After being generous supporters for seven years, this thoughtful couple has now decided to leave a bequest, to brain research at Florey Neuroscience Institutes.

Maureen and Ralph gave a lot of thought to the decision, but both say it was born out of seeing close members on both side of their family suffer severe brain disorders, including dementia and Parkinson’s disease.

As they have two children, the Stavelys naturally provided first for their family, but their belief in the importance of research is very genuine and has fuelled their long term commitment. They urge others to consider leaving a bequest in their Will to support brain research at FNI.

HAVE YOU MADE A WILL?

If so, how long since it was prepared?

Does it reflect the changes that have taken place in your life since the Will was prepared?
- In your family?
- In the value of your estate?
- In the lifetime interests you may wish to support?

You may need a new Will. It is the only way to ensure that your wishes are recorded in a legally binding form.

Christmas and New Year are traditional times for travelling. Make sure that your personal papers – but above all your Will – are up-to-date and with someone you trust in the event of an emergency.
In recent times, through the continuing generosity of Mr A.H. “Buck” Myers, owner of The Goodsight Company, our young scientists have regularly received Travel Awards to assist in their career development. In a recent visit to Melbourne, Mr Myers presented another cheque for $10,000 to Professor Geoffrey Donnan to ensure the continuation of The Goodsight Company Travel Award for a further three years. We thank Mr Myers for his thoughtfulness and generosity.

THE GOODSIGHT COMPANY TRAVEL AWARDS

The Goodsight Company has been a great supporter of Florey Neuroscience Institutes over many years, and since 1995 our research work has been the beneficiary of around $330,000.

FNI recently launched a multi-million dollar partnership looking at ways to detect the risk of recurrent stroke and post-stroke depression in patients. Furthermore, FNI and its partners will seek to extend stroke treatment through increasing the time frame of use of blood clot dissolving drugs.

In mid-September the CSIRO, FNI, The University of Melbourne and the Royal Melbourne Hospital officially launched a research cluster that will conduct the START (stroke, imaging, prevention and treatment) study of stroke.

This START cohort study is designed to integrate imaging and biomarker analysis to identify patients at risk of stroke. Those strategies will then be used to develop preventative measures for those patients. The study will collect and analyse information derived from brain imaging and blood samples taken from 200 Australian stroke victims with the aim of discovering and validating new diagnostic biomarkers to identify patients at risk of recurrent stroke and post-stroke depression.

Advanced imaging techniques will also be used by the cohort to improve the understanding of the vasculature and blood flow changes that take place in the brain during stroke.

Additionally, the program will trial the treatment of Tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA) from its usual time window of four hours to up nine hours post the onset of stroke.

The trial will be conducted in 20 hospitals throughout Australia and New Zealand and will involve up to 200 acute stroke patients.

The new research cluster was launched by the CSIRO Preventative Health Flagship Director, Prof Richard Head, Florey Neuroscience Institutes Director, Prof Geoff Donnan, and the CSIRO Chairman, Simon McKeon.

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Leader of the START cohort, Professor Donnan said, “Through the START cluster, Australia will lead and hold the data repository for the pre-eminent study of stroke impact world-wide. START will lead to improved treatment, recovery and reduced disability in stroke victims and the prevention of secondary stroke.”

“Identifying stroke biomarkers will greatly advance research into preventing or delaying the onset of this debilitating medical condition,” said Professor Head.
**ART RAISING FUNDS FOR MS**

Leo De Silva is a fine artist with a passion for medical research – and he recently donated the proceeds from the launch of his exhibition at the Melbourne Artists Gallery in East Melbourne. This generous effort enabled him to donate more than $7,000 to Professor Trevor Kilpatrick’s team which researches MS.

“My daughter Melanie suffers from MS,” Leo said when discussing his fundraising vision. “She is a medical researcher herself, so I know how vital financial support is to finding that breakthrough that leads to a cure.”

Leo was born in Singapore, and he joined the Straits Times in 1960 as a rookie artist. With his young family in tow, Leo migrated to Melbourne, Australia in 1989 where he joined the Herald Sun. He now paints full-time and works from his studio in Greenvale in Melbourne, Australia.

**COMMUNITY FUNDRAISERS IN THE NEWS**

Bronwen Bray from Shepparton is a woman with a mission – to raise funds for research into Motor Neuron Disease (MND), a devastating neurodegenerative condition for which there is currently no cure.

Inspired and aided by her friend Dianne Burgmann, Bronwen recently organised a dinner dance at Cellar 47 to honour their friend Russell Ford who was suffering from MND. Sadly, Russell passed away just six weeks later.

Also known as Lou Gherig’s disease, MND is caused by a loss of nerve cells (neurons) in the brain and spinal cord that control the muscles involved in movement, speech, swallowing and breathing. It’s the third most common brain degenerative disease after Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases.

Around 1,400 Australians are currently living with MND, and worldwide, MND is responsible for 100,000 deaths per year.

MND is difficult to diagnose because 90 percent of cases present with no family history or established cause, and there is no diagnostic marker at present. Research into this condition is vital as there is no cure and currently only one drug available to delay the progression of the disease.

Bronwen’s efforts raised $1,400 for research into Motor Neuron Disease at FNI, as well as making this event a great get-together for Russell, his friends and family. “I am so pleased I organised “Dare to Dance” when I did - Russell was so happy to see many old friends and acquaintances who he would not otherwise have seen.” Bronwen said:

If you too would like to dedicate a future event to supporting brain research, contact FNI’s Manager of Community Engagement and Fundraising Astrid Sweres on (03) 8344 1629.

**HIGHER HOPE FOR STROKE PATIENTS**

Recent discoveries at FNI may have found a new way to prevent brain damage in stroke patients.

During a stroke, enzymes in the brain release toxins resulting in brain damage. FNI scientists have discovered a drug that can switch off these toxins being released and would allow paramedics to administer it before a patient reaches the hospital.

“It can be given to a patient in the ambulance because you don’t require a scan to administer it” said Professor Geoff Donnan.

“Time is critical, minutes are valuable in saving millions of neurons, so any drug that can block the release of toxins, and can be administered early will greatly reduce the severity of stroke”, Professor Donnan went on to say.

Associate Professor David Howells was the Melbourne link in an international team of researchers that successfully switched off the toxins, thereby reducing brain damage and preserving brain function in mice. They found the same process occurred in human brains after a stroke.

“This affect is so big that it is far more likely to translate from the bench to the bedside and be more useful in patients”, said Associate Professor Howells.

“Currently, this drug is far more promising than any other because the benefit we’ve seen in animal models is far superior to anything we’ve seen before”, said Professor Donnan.

The next step will see researchers plan to commence clinical trials on humans over the next few years.

This story was featured on the ABC News 22/9/2010.
THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY DONATED TO THE FLOREY NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTES BETWEEN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2010. LISTED ARE THOSE WHO KINDLY DONATED $250 OR MORE.

ANAESTHESIA & INTENSIVE CARE TRUST FUND, CHARLES ALLEN AO, ANZ TRUSTEES, BETHLEHEM GRIFFITHS RESEARCH FOUNDATION, BRONWEN BRAY, RHONDA CHMIELNIK, BARBARA CLIFFORD, RICHARD COTTON AM, TIM CRAWLEY, CONSTANCE DAY, CAROL DE COTTA, ANN DE PAUL, J G DONALDSON, PHILIP DOUGLAS, FELICITY DRUCE, MARLENE DRYEN, EJM FINANCIAL SERVICES PTY LTD, NEILMA GANTNER, THE GARNSWORTHY FAMILY, GOOD SIGHT COMPANY LIMITED, RICHARD HARBIG, JUSTICE DAVID HARPER, INTERIORS AEROSERVICES PTY LTD, M M LIVERMORE, KEVIN LUSCOMBE AM, SCOBIE & CLAIRE MACKINNON TRUST, FRANK MARCACCO, KATHERINE MCGLOIN, ALEXANDER MCMILLAN, VIJITHA MELLING, NOEL MOLINE, NELSON ALEXANDER CHARITABLE FOUNDATION, BARRY NOVY, JUDITH OVERBEEK, LOVINIA PAGOTTO, DR K PEARSON, D J & J PINSON, ANDREW SAYERS, CHRISTINE SWEENEY, VALDA TRENBERTH, KEITH WILLIAMS, THULSI WILLIAMS.

WEBSITE TO LAUNCH SOON

In January 2010 FNI will the launch its new website at www.fl orey.edu.au

The site will collate the information from the existing websites from the partners merging to become FNI. Our hope is that the site will replace the Brain Research Institute, National Stroke Research Institute and Howard Florey Institute websites.

Trading on the well recognised Florey name, the site will feature public and researcher sections that will keep our visitors up to date with the latest FNI research, news and events.

Visitors to the new site can easily navigate their way around FNI’s divisions and laboratories, current projects, upcoming seminars and lectures, media announcements and publications. Podcasts and video links, as well as online giving will also be available.