

# Wessex Medical Research

Funding research to fight disease



The newsletter of WESSEX MEDICAL TRUST

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Registered Charity  
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## What does an Innovation Grant achieve?

*Alex Mirnezami was the recipient of one of our Innovation Grants. Here is his report on what he used the funds for and what it has led to...*

It all started 6 years ago. In 2007 I was lucky enough to receive an Innovation Grant from Wessex Medical Research for £9,305 to enable pump-priming of a project investigating the mechanisms by which bowel cancer spreads. This critical early-stage funding jump-started my programme of research work in the Cancer Sciences Division at Southampton.

Using the WMR funds, I was able to take time from my surgical workload as a clinical lecturer in Surgery to perform preliminary proof-of-principle laboratory work, and to commence a National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) portfolio study to examine surplus human bowel cancer tissue from patients in Wessex and the Channel Islands. The strength of the initial data that emerged, along with the strong research infrastructure available in Southampton, enabled me rapidly and successfully to apply for a £1m Cancer Research UK Clinician Scientist fellowship, which has since facilitated taking the work to the next level. Consequently I am able to remain at the coal face of patient care, seeing patients in clinic and operating on them in theatre, while pursuing the causes of their bowel cancer and its spread in the laboratory, enabling a true “bedside to bench” approach to this condition.

My research goals were simple. Bowel cancer was (and sadly remains) the second most common cause of cancer death in the UK—an inescapable fact which one confronts regularly in my field of General and Colorectal Surgery. The actual cause of death is the spread of the cancer beyond the bowel itself. My goal was to investigate a new class of critical and regulatory cellular molecules in this process. Emerging evidence suggested that these molecules were not simple rank and file genes but could be some of the key masterminds behind the spread of cancer in general, namely microRNAs. We started by examining dozens of tumours from our local patients who had kindly and generously donated their tissues. The results that have since emerged have fuelled a number of key research papers and extended our understanding of the complexity of bowel cancer spread. More importantly, they have also provided clear evidence that evaluation of microRNAs in human bowel cancer has several key advantages. It can help in improving staging of patients with bowel cancer; in determining which patients may benefit from additional therapies such as chemotherapy; and furthermore offers new opportunities in the design of drugs to target this condition.

Working in collaboration with Dr Emre Sayan and Professor Graham Packham in the Southampton CRUK Centre, we have now examined over 300 tumour samples and found what appears to be a robust method for predicting the secret spread of cancer cells to distant body organs. Using this methodology we have collaborated with other groups in the UK as well as in Italy, the US, and Japan, to start the process of validating these findings and to commence definitive clinical trials.

It is my hope that this work may ultimately impact the local patients I see and operate on and lead to more refined and personalised cancer treatments with greater therapeutic impact. This journey began thanks to the generous support of Wessex Medical Research and I remain eternally grateful to WMR and the trustees for their timely funding.



*Mr Mirnezami is Cancer Research UK Clinician Scientist, Senior Lecturer in General Surgery and Honorary Consultant Colorectal Surgeon at Southampton*

### In this issue:

What does an Innovation Grant achieve? 1

Volunteer Retirements 2

Dates for your Diary 2

Events 3

Child Brain injury—an update 4

## Volunteer Retirements

During the last six months, we have bid a fond farewell to two of the stalwarts amongst our volunteers. Glyn Allen (*right*) has been a member and secretary of the volunteer group on Guernsey. A retired research chemist, Glyn has had a keen professional interest in medical research and



his valuable input will be greatly missed. He has been part of the magnificent team on the Island which in recent years has consistently raised substantial sums, initially for research into early detection of breast cancer and more recently for similar research into prostate and ovarian cancer. Over in Salisbury, Bill Lockyer (*left*), a successful local famer, has put in over ten years' service for the volunteer group there. His hard work and dedication to the worthy cause of medical research will be similarly much missed. We extend our grateful thanks to both Glyn and Bill for all their efforts on behalf of our charity and look forward to seeing them again regularly at our events



*The retirement of long-standing volunteers such as Glyn and Bill has resulted in several vacancies on our volunteer group committees. If you feel you might be able to help by giving a few hours of your time each month to support our worthy cause, please get in touch with Wendy Burchall on [wendy.burchall@wesmed.org.uk](mailto:wendy.burchall@wesmed.org.uk) or call her on 07792 586243. She will be delighted to hear from you!*



For some time now, we have been promoting the idea of recycling used mobile phones and printer cartridges for the benefit of WMR. This is an ongoing appeal so please dig around and see what you can find. You can either send them direct to recycle4charity (go to their website as above for freepost instructions—but remember to tell them it's for the benefit of Wessex Medical Research and give our reference number C16805) or call the office for a freepost envelope.

## Dates for your Diary

April 21	London Marathon
May 9	Speaker Supper <i>Romsey</i> <i>Speaker: Mr Ramsey Cuttress,</i> <i>Consultant Breast Cancer Surgeon</i>
June 14	Rock'n'Pop Evening <i>Soul Cellar, Southampton</i> <i>—featuring bands from the Police &amp; Fire Service</i>
July 4	Coffee Morning <i>Romsey</i>
August 31	Quiz & Chips <i>Gosport and Lee</i>
7 & 8 September	Camping weekend
September 29	Thai Banquet <i>Winchester</i>
October 8	Quiz Night <i>Romsey</i>
October 17	Speaker Supper <i>New Forest</i> <i>Speaker: Dr Matt Rose-Zerilli, Cancer Sciences</i>

***Please check the website for details of these and additional activities and give us your active support wherever you can.***

## Events

Our Volunteer Groups have again been busy throughout the autumn and winter organising the following events;

- ◇ Both Salisbury and New Forest Volunteer Groups held Quiz Evenings and each raised over £800

- ◇ Gosport and Lee Volunteer Group has held two Speaker Lunches: in November, the guest speaker was Dr Jon Dawson, a researcher in orthopaedics and in March, Dr Sara Demain a physiotherapist from the Faculty of Health Sciences. Both events were well supported and a total of over £500 was raised for medical research.



*Quizzing in Salisbury is serious business!*

- ◇ Romsey Volunteer Group organised a well-attended Ladies Evening which raised some £500.
- ◇ A Jazz Evening organised by Salisbury Volunteer Group was successful in raising over £800.
- ◇ And finally—



*Patron Pamela Kimber gives the vote of thanks*

The concert given by the London Welsh Male Voice Choir in Romsey Abbey, organised by the New Forest Volunteer Group, took place just two days before this Newsletter went to press. The event itself was a great success—and we have been able to sneak in a quick picture. However, it is too early to have final financial figures but initial indications are that we have equalled or possibly exceeded last time's net profit of £6,500. If confirmed, that would be a wonderful outcome.



In Memoriam

*Since our last newsletter, we  
have received donations in  
memory of:*

**David Walker**

*We extend our sympathies to  
his family and friends and our  
gratitude for the donations  
received*

*We are proud to be a  
member of the Association  
of Medical Research  
Charities and are pleased  
to report that we  
successfully passed the  
latest AMRC peer review  
audit in 2011.*



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## Child Brain Injury appeal—an update

Our appeal—launched in the Autumn of 2012—is progressing well. The two formal grant applications (one for the development of a pressure-testing probe and one for utilising a patient's own dormant stem cells to repair damaged brain tissue), submitted by Mr Aminul Ahmed and Mr Diederik Bulters, have both now been formally and successfully peer reviewed. This is in accordance with the standards set by the AMRC. Against our appeal target, we have so far raised or been promised over £17,000 which is very encouraging. This does not include income from the skydive or the London Marathon. The skydive has had to be postponed twice because of bad weather: as we write, it has now been rescheduled for Sunday 14th April so this Newsletter will have gone to

*Mr Aminul Ahmed and Mr Diederik Bulters*

press before we know the outcome. Similarly, the London Marathon is being held on 21st April and we have at least three runners dedicated to raising funds for the Appeal. In addition, there are a number of dedicated fundraising activities scheduled for the summer, particularly by our volunteers on Guernsey, and there is a camping weekend being organised by Southampton Soroptimists on the first weekend in September (see advertisement below—we hope the weather holds for that!). We are very hopeful that, with a good effort all round, we will be able to achieve our target. We will be reporting fully in our Autumn 2013 Newsletter and hope at the same time to be able to confirm the award of the two grants.