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Cancer discovery leads to prestigious medical research prize

An Australian scientist who has revealed how specialised immune cells protect against cancer has been named the winner of the *'In Memory of Neil Lawrence Prize'* at the 2019 Centenary Institute Medical Innovation Awards.

Dr Simone Park from the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection & Immunity at The University of Melbourne is focused on better understanding how the immune system can be targeted and/or activated to treat disease including cancer.

She discovered that specialised immune cells – known as tissue-resident memory T (TRM) cells – could suppress the growth of melanoma cancer cells without completely eliminating them. In identifying that TRM cells are critical players in the anti-cancer immune response, she believes that the targeting of these cells could open the door to a new and innovative strategy to improve cancer treatments.

As winner of the *'In Memory of Neil Lawrence Prize'*, Dr Park has been awarded \$30,000 from Centenary's proud sponsor Commonwealth Private to support her ongoing research, as well as a perpetual Nick Mount hand blown glass trophy.

Dr Park says she is honoured to be taking home first prize in this year's Awards.

"I feel thrilled and so grateful to have my ideas and research endorsed with this distinguished award. For an early-career researcher, seeing your work recognised and supported at this level is incredibly validating. I know that this opportunity will greatly advance not only my current research but also my future scientific career," says Dr Park.

Marianne Perkovic, Executive General Manager, Commonwealth Private said, "It's a great pleasure to partner with the Centenary Institute, and on behalf of everyone at Commonwealth Private, I congratulate Dr Simone Park as the winner of *'In Memory of Neil Lawrence Prize'*."

Dr Elinor Hortle from the Centenary Institute has been awarded the \$15,000 *'Bayer Innovation Award'* after finishing in second place for her discovery that platelets (cells that help the body form clots to stop bleeding) have an active role in the development of tuberculosis (TB). This provided evidence that cheap, safe, and easily available anti-platelet drugs like aspirin might provide an effective treatment for TB.

The *'Harvard Club of Australia Foundation Travel Prize'* worth \$5,000 for the purpose of travelling to Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA to explore opportunities for collaboration, also went to Dr Elinor Hortle.

Separately, Dr Elise McGlashan from the Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health – Monash University has been named winner of the *'People's Choice Award'*, voted on by the general public and research community, for her work showing that simple changes to light exposure could dramatically increase the number of patients who benefit from first-line antidepressant medications.

The Centenary Institute would like to congratulate all three scientists on their outstanding achievements, and thank the sponsors for their ongoing support of these prestigious awards.

About the CIMIA: The annual Centenary Institute Medical Innovation Awards are designed to recognise and celebrate Australia's bold young researchers who are taking risks and challenging the big questions of medical research, while promoting a domestic culture of brilliance in medical research. Critically, the Awards aids recognition of young talented researchers at an early stage, and in supporting their work, helps drive the development of new innovative ways to treat and prevent disease. The winners were determined after careful consideration by an international panel of adjudicators.

IMAGES:

Dr Simone Park – <https://tinyurl.com/yynhbdz6> and <https://tinyurl.com/y3ebp4jd>

Dr Elinor Hortle – <https://tinyurl.com/yxrhwzqy> and <https://tinyurl.com/y4jlyevv>

Dr Elise McGlashan - <https://tinyurl.com/y5rm5d4d> and <https://tinyurl.com/y6z9q8ac>

VIDEO:

Video of Dr Park - <https://tinyurl.com/yxvv3djo>

Video of Dr Hortle - <https://tinyurl.com/y5px4on8>

For all media enquiries including interviews with the researchers, please contact Tony Crawshaw, Media and Communications Manager, Centenary Institute on 0402 770 403 or email: t.crawshaw@centenary.org.au

About the Centenary Institute

The Centenary Institute is a world-leading independent medical research institute, closely affiliated to the University of Sydney and the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Our research focuses on three key areas: cancer, inflammation and cardiovascular disease. Our strength lays in uncovering disease mechanisms and applying this knowledge to improve diagnostics and treatments for patients.

For more information about Centenary Institute, visit www.centenary.org.au