Around the universities and research institutes

Researchers in the fields of infectious disease, autoimmunity, chronic pain and Parkinson disease are among the Australian researchers honoured with **National Health and Medical Research Council** (NHMRC) Research Excellence Awards.

Associate Professor James Ward, from **Monash University** and **the Alfred**, received the Rising Star Research Excellence Award for the top-ranked application by an Indigenous researcher in the Early Career Fellowship scheme. His research focuses on using health service and public health interventions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with sexually transmissible infections, HIV and viral hepatitis. Professor Carola Garcia de Vinuesa, head of the Department of Immunology and Infectious Disease at the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the **Australian National University**, was recognised twice, with her award for the top-ranked Project Grant application as well as the NHMRC Elizabeth Blackburn Fellowship (Biomedical) for her research on the development of rogue antibodies that lead to autoimmune and allergic diseases. The biennial NHMRC Outstanding Contribution Award was presented to Professor Jane Hall, director of Strategy for the **Centre for Health Economics and Research Evaluation** at the **University of Technology Sydney**, and professor of Health Economics in the UTS Business School, honouring her long-term commitment to the fields of health economics and health services research, as a researcher, mentor and health policy advocate. Dr Nikolajs Zeps, from the **University of Western Australia**, was the recipient of the biennial NHMRC Ethics Award in recognition of his leadership in the development of ethics policies and standards, both within Australia and internationally.

https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/mr-research_excellence_awards_2017.pdf

Associate Professor Heidi Drummer, the **Burnet Institute**'s Program Director of Disease Elimination, has been elected as president of the Australian Centre for Hepatitis Virology (ACHV). Associate Professor Drummer is renowned for her landmark research into hepatitis C, and her laboratory conducts studies into HCV with a special focus on the development of a vaccine. She said that an effective hepatitis B vaccine (HBV) had led to misconceptions that further HBV research was unnecessary. However, more than 257 million people are infected with HBV and it accounts for more than 800 000 deaths each year. "Ongoing research is urgently required to identify better antivirals that can cure hepatitis B, and more research is required on HBV vaccination and efficacy," Associate Professor Drummer said. Effective treatments for hepatitis C virus (HCV) had also led to a view that more hepatitis C research was not needed, she said. "Over 350 000 people die each year from HCV, and over 70 million people are thought to be actively infected," Associate Professor Drummer said. "Direct acting antivirals have revolutionised treatment of those currently infected with cure rates of over 95%. However, a vaccine to prevent HCV and rapid point-of-care diagnostics to detect active infection have not been developed. A combined approach of testing, treatment, vaccination and on-going harm reduction is essential if we are to meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2030 elimination targets." The ACHV evolved from a meeting held in 1989 at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital in Melbourne. Since 1994, an annual meeting has been held as a forum for scientists investigating hepatitis viruses to discuss research and establish collaborations. The ACHV awards prizes to students and early career researchers to attend international meetings, distributes prizes for presentations at national meetings, and provides support to relevant scientific meetings and symposia.

https://www.burnet.edu.au/news/854_burnet_researcher_elected_president_of_achv

Kerryn Moore, a PhD candidate at the **Burnet Institute** and the **University of Melbourne**, studying malaria in pregnant women, has been awarded the Aileen Plant Memorial Prize for a paper on the safety of artemisinin treatment of falciparum malaria in the first trimester of pregnancy, published in *The Lancet* in February 2016. Her analysis of data from the Thailand-Myanmar border was combined with data from Africa and presented to the WHO in 2015. This work led to a recommendation by a WHO evidence review group that treatment guidelines for pregnant women should change from quinine to the more effective artemisinin-based antimalarials. Previously artemisinin-based antimalarials were not recommended during the first trimester of pregnancy, despite being the most effective drug available, because their safety during this period was unknown. However, it is expected WHO guidelines are now likely to change to allow the more effective treatment. The Aileen Plant Memorial Prize is awarded annually for a first author paper by an Australian researcher in the area of infectious disease epidemiology. Ms Moore is supervised by Associate Professor Freya Fowkes, Associate Professor Julie Simpson, and Professor Rose McGready. Ms Moore is based part-time at the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU) – a field station of the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, **Mahidol University** – on the Thai-Myanmar border.

https://www.burnet.edu.au/news/853_kerryn_moore_awarded_aileen_plant_memorial_prize

Four members of the Bone Biology Division at the **Garvan Institute of Medical Research** received awards at the joint annual scientific meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Bone and Mineral Society (ANZBMS) and the International Federation of Musculoskeletal Research Societies (IFMRS). Dr Michelle McDonald won an Amgen-ANZBMS Outstanding Abstract Award. This is the third year in a row that Dr McDonald has been awarded in this way, itself an outstanding achievement. Dr McDonald spoke about her work examining the potential for anti-sclerostin therapy to prevent bone loss and bone fracture induced by multiple myeloma; Dr Weiwen Chen won the MSD ANZBMS Clinical Research Excellence Award. She spoke about how osteoporotic fractures affect mortality, and described how osteoporotic fractures contribute to overall population mortality at a level similar to diabetes and cancer; Scott Youlten received the Christopher and Margie Nordin Young Investigator Poster Award. His poster set out his work in understanding how the spectrum of genes that are expressed in bone cells varies with age and gender, following on from his talk at the conference examining how gene expression changes throughout the skeleton; and, Thao Ho-Le won the prestigious Sol Posen Research Award for the best first author publication submitted in the previous 18 months, for her recent paper describing how genetic profiling can deepen our understanding of an individual's risk of fracture.

https://www.garvan.org.au/news-events/news/success-for-garvan-researchers-at-key-bone-biology-conference

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