

We're trying to wipe out the 'Big C' Our Latest Grants and Funding

This summer, in the fight against cancer, the Genesis Oncology Trust has awarded \$553,000 to support a range of research and education projects. The following doctors, researchers and health professionals have received a funding boost from the Trust.

For more information on each project, visit www.genesisoncology.org.nz

Postgraduate (PhD) Scholarship

Graeme Fielder, Liggins Institute, University of Auckland – Characterising novel molecules implicated in the development of breast cancer

Research Projects

Dr Jill Bennett, School of Nursing, University of Auckland

– Coping with life after cancer study, (Genesis Oncology Trust/Westpac Institutional Bank Award);

Dr Brian Cox, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, University of Otago

– Did free school milk reduce the risk of colorectal cancer?

Dr John Evans, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Otago – Vascular growth factor in tissues from endometrial cancers;

Dr Michael Jameson, Department of Oncology, Waikato Hospital, (Bruce Blue Award)

– Reducing side effects from cancer therapies in lung cancer patients;

Dr Melanie-Jane McConnell, Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Wellington

– Blocking enzymes in cancer cells to increase drug effectiveness;

Dr Patrizia Stoitzner, Malaghan Institute of Medical Research

– Vaccination through the skin to treat skin cancer.

Special Purpose Grants

Karen Anderson, Hospice Wanganui; **Dr Patries Herst**, Malaghan Institute, Wellington; **Mary Schumacher**,

Hospice New Zealand, Wellington; **Dr Graham Stevens**, Discipline of Oncology, University of Auckland;

Julia Thomson, Mercy Hospice, Auckland; **Jane Vella-Brincat**, Nurse Maude Hospice, Christchurch.

Professional Development Awards

Carla Arkless, Hospice Southland; **Dr Jill Bennett**, School of Nursing, University of Auckland;

Dr David Bawden, North Haven Hospice, Whangarei; **Suzanne Brocx**, Hospice Bay of Islands;

Dr Sheryl Gough, Department of Pathology, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Science;

Dr Kylie Hood, Wakefield Hospital, Wellington; **Colleen Kendrick**, Waikato/Bay of Plenty Cancer

Society; **Jillian Lamb**, Department of Colposcopy, Christchurch Women's Hospital; **Dr Marion Taylor**,

Hospice Wanganui; **Dr Andrew Wood**, Starship Children's Health, Auckland.



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new hope



Murray Jackson, Chairman, Genesis Oncology Trust

I am pleased to present another edition of New Hope which will bring you up to date with the latest projects funded by the Genesis Oncology Trust. With your contributions the Trust continues to make a significant impact on cancer control in New Zealand.

'Cancer control' may be a phrase you have not encountered before, but it is now the accepted way to describe all the activities that take place around the management of cancer. Cancer control covers prevention,

through diagnosis, treatment and post-treatment care, to palliative care, and it is important that research and education in all these areas receive appropriate funding. Balancing funding between the different areas of cancer control is a tricky business. The Trust's expert assessment committee, which evaluates applications to the Trust's annual grant round, has done an excellent job of making sure that good research and professional development across the spectrum of cancer control is supported.

To illustrate this diversity we have highlighted two projects funded in our 2006 annual grant round. The first is being carried out by Dr Brian Cox and is in the field of cancer prevention. It concerns the possible role of New Zealand's long abandoned school milk programme in preventing bowel cancer. The second project is concerned with helping patients manage the psychological effects that many experience after the successful treatment of cancer. A call for volunteers to join the study is included in this issue of New Hope, so we are pleased to be able to offer practical as well as financial assistance to the study's lead investigator Dr Jill Bennett.

The dollars you donate via your energy bill really do help us to make a difference, and on behalf of the trustees I thank you for your continued generosity.



Pictured from left to right: John Gavin, Helen Glasgow, Murray Jackson, Maureen Shaddick, Alan Gray and Betsy Marshall

New cancer research grant milks the benefits

Is drinking plenty of milk as a child the key to preventing bowel cancer in later life?

Associate Professor Brian Cox, of the Hugh Adam Cancer Epidemiology Unit at the University of Otago, thinks so. He is investigating the link between New Zealand's long-since-abandoned school milk programme and the reduced risk of developing bowel cancer among those who drank the milk.

New Zealand has the highest rate of bowel cancer in the world. However, work by Professor Cox has shown that the risk of developing bowel cancer is significantly reduced in men and women born in New Zealand between 1941 and 1956.

Professor Cox is a medical epidemiologist, a doctor who studies the health of whole populations, and finding out why this group has a lower incidence of bowel cancer could help find ways to prevent the disease. Professor Cox believes the answer may lie in the fact that this group of people attended school during the period where all school children aged 7-12 years received a free half pint of milk each school day (from 1937 to 1967).

This hypothesis is based on the observation that supplementing the diet with calcium is known to reduce the occurrence of certain types of bowel cancer, and the free milk would have provided about 75% of the daily calcium requirement for many children of the time.

Having made the initial link, Professor Cox and Dr Mary Jane Sneyd now plan to investigate further with the help of a research grant from the Genesis Oncology Trust. They will survey 1000 New Zealanders aged 25 to 69 years, some with bowel cancer and some without. Using questionnaires, all participants will be asked about their recollections of school milk consumption, and other aspects of their diet.

Professor Cox says, "identification of milk consumption in youth as a protective factor for bowel cancer would allow a targeted approach during the most important time of life for the prevention of this cancer. It would also benefit the dairy industry, potentially increasing dairy exports with resulting benefits to society and the economy. It is also possible that a new risk factor for bowel cancer may be identified that could be targeted in the prevention and treatment of this devastating disease."



Associate Professor Brian Cox and Dr Mary Jane Sneyd

Life After Cancer – Dr Jill Bennett, School of Nursing, University of Auckland



Dr Jill Bennett

In New Zealand, the number of people diagnosed with cancer has been growing, but deaths caused by cancer have been steadily decreasing. Some cancers that were once uniformly fatal, such as testicular cancer, are now cured in nearly all cases. And many people who get common cancers – cancers of the breast, colon and prostate – become long-term survivors. The major forms of cancer treatment – surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, and radiotherapy – have saved many lives, but these treatments can have unwelcome long-term effects. Even when cancer has been completely eliminated, many survivors have persistent problems, such as fatigue, anxiety about cancer recurrence, sexual difficulties, loss of bone density, balance difficulties, trouble concentrating and other symptoms. Some cancer survivors also report financial and workplace difficulties as a result of their cancer experiences.

A study of issues faced by cancer survivors in New Zealand has recently been funded by the Genesis Oncology Trust with the aid of a donation from Westpac Institutional Bank. The Life After Cancer Study will provide an understanding of the issues faced by cancer survivors from the viewpoints of the survivors themselves. Cancer survivors will answer a written questionnaire developed by an interdisciplinary research team at the University of Auckland and the University of Otago in conjunction with cancer specialists from Auckland Hospital. The questionnaire will address many issues commonly reported by cancer survivors in other countries, with space for New Zealand survivors to mention any additional issues. The questionnaire will be revised during the study in response to participants' feedback, and the final version of the questionnaire will be used for an even larger nationwide survey of cancer survivors.

Dr Jill Bennett, leader of the research team, says that finding cancer survivors in New Zealand is a significant challenge of this study, as there is no central registry that follows survivors after they complete cancer treatment. "When we talk about the study with cancer survivors, there seems to be great enthusiasm for the idea of answering questions about their experiences with cancer. Most survivors feel they changed in many ways after they were diagnosed with cancer and are keen to share their experiences in the hope of helping other survivors."

The Life After Cancer Study is an important first step in understanding the survivorship part of the cancer continuum. Knowledge gained from survivors who answer the questionnaire will be useful in making a persuasive argument for developing solutions to problems faced by New Zealanders who live long lives after cancer and cancer treatment.

Are you a cancer survivor?

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study of Cancer Survivors in New Zealand

We want to find out what problems cancer survivors face and what sort of help they need.

If you:

- were aged at least 18 when diagnosed
- finished your cancer treatment at least six months ago
- are interested in sharing issues faced by cancer survivors by spending 1-2 hours filling in a questionnaire posted to you at home

Then please contact: **Tanja Ottaway: 09 373 7599, ext 89752 (from outside Auckland: freephone 0800 333 227) t.ottaway@auckland.ac.nz**

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