

PRESS RELEASE For consumer media



For issue: 30th July 2018 Embargoed to: 9AM EST 1st August 2018

New era of research grants supporting the search for a cure for people with rare blood cancers

- **2 Seeding Grants from The Ruby Red Foundation**
- **Monash University and The University of Western Australia are the first award recipients, researching rare blood cancers called myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPNs)**
- **Ruby Red is Australia's only registered charity dedicated to raising funds for MPN research**

The Ruby Red Foundation announces its inaugural series of research grants in line with its primary objective of directing funding to further research into myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPN's). The seeding grants were awarded following a competitive request for proposals by Ruby Red earlier this year to institutions with an interest in MPN research.

"The focus is on supporting research that will have a direct impact on understanding the drivers of disease progression in MPNs and identifying new targets in the pursuit of breakthrough treatments" said **Dr Laura Issa**, Non-Executive Director for the Ruby Red Foundation.

The grants were made possible through the generous support of employees of the Commonwealth Bank Group Property and Security whose fundraising efforts have supported Ruby Red since its inception.

Each grant will support a research project with potential to improve the lives of people with MPNs. Patients live with debilitating symptoms and harsh side effects, as current treatments aim to reduce the risks of bleeds or clots but do not prevent the risk of disease progression to acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) or myelofibrosis and there is currently no cure.

Ruby Red congratulates **Dr Kevin Gillinder** from **The Australian Centre for Blood Diseases, Monash University**, who is investigating the role of JAK2 gene mutations in causing progression to acute leukaemia and potential new targets for treatment and **Dr Belinda Guo**, from **The University of Western Australia** who will investigate how genes cause fibrotic changes (scarring) in the bone marrow, with a view to develop a non-invasive, blood-based test to identify which patients will progress to myelofibrosis, where the bone marrow stops working.

JAK2 is one of the acquired gene mutations found in MPNs and people with this mutation have a higher risk of developing AML. Dr Gillinder's work looking at the genetic sequences of people with MPNs may help to identify a target for treatment of MPNs.

"To be able to understand why disease progresses in some patients and not others may lead to treatments which slow or prevent progression to AML or myelofibrosis. Reducing the need for extremely painful and invasive bone marrow biopsies (BMBs) with better blood-based testing would benefit patients and researchers. Many people refuse to have BMBs or don't have them regularly as they are so painful, but it's currently the only way to monitor progression", informs, **Sophie Gibson**

"There were other excellent proposals which we are unable to support in this round", commented Dr Issa, *"however we will expand the grants program through active fund raising and partnering with corporates with a common purpose to drive medical research in rare blood cancers"*.

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“The University of Western Australia wishes to thank the Ruby Red Foundation for supporting this important research which will determine whether blood testing can be used to predict progression to marrow scarring. This work will make a real difference for people living with myeloproliferative neoplasms”, reaffirmed Professor Wendy Erber, Executive Dean Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences.

Award recipient Dr Kevin Gillinder also thanked the Ruby Red Foundation for their kind support: “This grant will be used to help identify new druggable targets in JAK-STAT signalling for the treatment of MPNs”.

Sophie Gibson, is a strong supporter of research, and as founder of Ruby Red, is motivated by the pursuit of a cure for MPNs. *“My young daughter has an MPN so I’m passionate about raising funds and ensuring the MPN research community is well supported into the future.”*

*“As a mother, I worry about the long term effects of treatments used to reduce the risk of bleeds and clots, quality of life and whether my daughter’s illness will progress to myelofibrosis or AML and wish there was a way to stop it, or a cure to make her cancer go away”, says **Sophie Gibson**.*

*“On top of that is the burden of living with a hidden, chronic cancer. It’s much harder for people to understand a malignancy in the bone marrow, than a solid tumour which can be surgically removed. Patients live with debilitating symptoms including chronic pain and fatigue, which impact people differently. It can be hard for people to understand when patients ‘look well’. Yet, everyday patients and carers are dealing with treatment and worry about disease progression. That is why for me it was so important to do something and start raising funds for research. Australia has brilliant researchers and we need to support the researchers to make MPN a priority”, affirms **Sophie Gibson**.*

About Myeloproliferative Neoplasms

MPNs are hidden, debilitating, complicated and chronic blood cancers that affect normal blood production in the bone marrow.

The most common MPNs are Essential Thrombocythaemia (ET), Polycythaemia Vera (PV) and Primary Myelofibrosis (PMF). MPNs usually occur in people over 60 years of age but are increasingly diagnosed in people under 40 years and occasionally in children.

In MPNs, the bone marrow overproduces one or more types of blood cells (*red cells* – which transport oxygen around the body, *white cells* – which fight disease or *platelets* – which cause blood to clot to prevent bleeding). If not promptly diagnosed and effectively treated the excessive numbers of blood cells can cause serious complications, such as stroke or heart attack. MPNs can also progress to aggressive Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML) or Myelofibrois, in which the marrow scars and stops working.

About Ruby Red

The Ruby Red Foundation is a nationally registered health promotion charity and volunteer organisation with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status. Ruby Red is working to identify and prioritise MPN research projects, increase understanding of MPNs, advance treatment and ultimately find a cure. The purpose of Ruby Red is to improve the lives of people with MPNs through research and support.

Ruby Red works with MPN experts, healthcare professionals and researchers to identify and support research projects which hold promise for MPN treatments in Australia.

For more about the Ruby Red Foundation, please visit: rubyred.org.au

Facebook: @rubyredfdn

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This media release has been issued by the Ruby Red Foundation

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