

WAIMR to fund two new melanoma projects

Researchers hope to improve chemotherapy drugs and discover new melanoma treatments

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The Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) has awarded grants of \$75,000 each to two of its scientists hoping to identify new treatments for [melanoma](#) as well as boost the effectiveness of chemotherapy drugs against the disease.

"Although there is a substantial arsenal of anti-cancer weapons available, melanomas can be particularly challenging because they often don't respond well to chemotherapy, making them difficult to treat," said Dr Robin Scaife with WAIMR's Molecular Discovery Systems laboratory.

"Recent investigations looking at cell division have, however, brought to light potential new strategies to target chemoresistant cancerous cells, opening up the possibility of using current chemotherapy drugs with more success."

He added that a number of new experimental drugs targeting growth pathways involved in melanoma were showing positive results.

Dr Scaife and his colleagues, WAIMR director Professor Peter Klinken and University of Western Australia Professor Jiake Xu plan to use sophisticated cell imaging and analysis equipment at WAIMR's Molecular Discovery Systems laboratory to screen large numbers of drug-like molecules in a bid to identify new drug leads.

The other grant recipient, WAIMR scientist Dr Keith Giles, is examining two microRNA molecules linked to melanoma in the hope of uncovering new approaches to prevent the invasion and growth of the disease.

"We are investigating if these molecules have the power to slow the progress of melanoma cell growth, and also if their presence may make melanoma cells more sensitive to some chemotherapy drugs," Dr Giles said.

Both grants came from the Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre (SKMRC). Scott Kirkbride was a promising young Perth golfer who succumbed to melanoma in 2004 aged 27. Australia has among the world's highest rates of melanoma with some 10,000 new cases diagnosed every year.