

MENZIES RESEARCHERS SHINE AS AUSTRALIA'S STRENGTH IN HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH IS CELEBRATED

Thursday, 14 July 2016

Two inspiring health researchers from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) were awarded prestigious National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Research Excellence Awards* last night in Canberra.

International leader in Indigenous cancer research, Associate Professor Gail Garvey and PhD student, Dr Robert Commons received the 2016 NHMRC *Rising Star Research Excellence* and *Gustav Nossal* awards respectively.

Assoc Prof Garvey, a post-doctoral research fellow received the *Rising Star Award* as the top-ranked Indigenous Early Career Fellowship recipient in recognition of her work to raise both the research and health services profile regarding the cancer disparities facing Indigenous Australians.

Dr Commons was awarded the *Gustav Nossal Award* as the highest ranked applicant for an NHMRC Postgraduate Scholarship in the field of medical and dental research for his project to tackle the global burden of malaria.

In their tenth year, the awards recognise outstanding performance and excellence in health and medical research and innovation.

"Of all human endeavours, health and medical research has some of the greatest potential to improve the quality of human life. The current era is one of unparalleled promise in our quest to understand, prevent, manage and cure previously intractable diseases in Australia and beyond," NHMRC CEO Professor Anne Kelso said.

Receiving the *Rising Star Award* tops off a big year for Assoc Prof Garvey who also conceived and hosted the world's first Indigenous cancer conference in Brisbane in April, which attracted over 320 international participants.

"Despite the high standard of health in Australia in general, a disproportionate burden of cancer adversely impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians," explained Assoc Prof Garvey.

"Cancer has impacted on my family and this has given me a lot of insight into how difficult it can be to deal with a cancer diagnosis but also the ongoing challenges of accessing appropriate care in a health system that is not responsive to the cultural, practical and information needs of Indigenous Australians.

"Through my teams' research we have changed the way research is conducted through ensuring all aspects of the process involve genuine Indigenous engagement, leadership and participation."

Dr Commons is the second Menzies researcher to receive the prestigious Gustav Nossal award since its inception in 2014.

"Sir Gustav Nossal is an internationally renowned scientist whose ground-breaking work in immunology and global health has made him one of the most significant figures in Australia's medical and scientific community. I would like to thank the NHMRC awards committee and our research team at Menzies for this recognition," Dr Commons said.

“Vivax malaria causes more than 15 million deaths annually. Despite radical treatment available using the drug primaquine to kill the form of vivax malaria that resides in the liver, the drug can cause severe anaemia in some patients.

“This concern about severe anaemia has prevented widespread use of the drug by patients with vivax malaria. By working with clinical research partners around the world we will perform a risk-benefit analysis of primaquine to cure vivax malaria,” Dr Commons said.

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Media note:

Assoc Prof Garvey is also the principal investigator for a NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence, has over 49 peer-reviewed journal articles and awards of over \$12.6 million in competitive research funding. You can view her researcher profile here -

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/Gail_Garvey/

Dr Commons' profile can be viewed here:

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/Robert_Commons/

Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's leading medical research institute dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. We have a 31-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. We collaborate to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.