

Media release – Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2019

***Melbourne welcomes***

**Dr Elizabeth Finkel the 2019 ASMR Medallist**

Dr Elizabeth Finkel is a trailblazing Australian science journalist with a background in biomedical research.

A gifted story teller and communicator, Dr Finkel is the recipient of numerous awards for journalism and also co-founder of Cosmos Magazine.

She has authored ‘The Genome Generation’ which covers genetic developments in diverse areas such as medicine, agriculture, and evolution, clearly contextualising their relevant applications to our society.

*“The sort of things I used to do to fruit flies at USCF – supply them with new genes – are now being done in people to achieve ‘biblical’ results. Toddlers born with SMA (spinal muscular atrophy), who should be crippled or dead, are walking.*”

Dr Finkel brings a human face to the science of gene therapy, that bold and amazing idea of treating inherited diseases by replacing the missing gene.

***She said “There has never been a more important time to broadcast the scientific method to the general public. We have entered the post-truth era. We’re back to a dark age, where people seem unable to differentiate between fanatical hype and the evidence of experts.”***

WHO: Dr Elizabeth Finkel, ASMR Medalist 2019  
WHAT: Speaking at ASMR MRW® Gala Dinner Melbourne  
WHERE: Cargo Hall, South Wharf  
WHEN: 7pm, Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2019

**Media contacts: Dr Amy Winship 0401 657 785 or  
Catherine West 0415 928 211  
Interview opportunities**

## **MELBOURNES'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST: ASMR STUDENT AWARD WINNERS SPEAK AT THE MELBOURNE GALA DINNER**

**7pm Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June, Cargo Hall, South Wharf**

### **Final year PhD student award winner: Ana Rita Leitoguinho, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute**

A special family of genes, called homeobox genes control cell fate from stem cells, into working cells. But new data from Ana has shown that if the levels of one of these genes, Ventx, are too high, immature blood cells stay arrested, preventing them from maturing into immune cells.

### **2nd year PhD student award winner: Erin McGowan, University of Melbourne**

The parasite Leishmania leads to significant global morbidity and mortality, especially in developing countries. Erin's research studies how immune cells make and break down Omega-3 fats and how this affects the growth and survival of these parasites during infection. She is also testing new, more efficient drugs.

### **1st year PhD student award winner: Milla Mclean, University of Melbourne**

Patients with severe kidney disease are at risk of contracting infections, like tuberculosis. Milla studies new ways of monitoring the immune system in patients with kidney disease to better predict which patients will be more susceptible to infections.

### **Undergraduate student award winner: Maurin Tirtabrata, University of Melbourne**

Nearly 50% of early diagnosed breast cancer cases are in elderly patients. Maurin analyzed 13 studies, with elderly breast cancer patients, showing that shorter radiotherapy regimen (larger dose, over fewer sessions) than conventional regimens increased disease-free survival. the shortened treatment period is a convenient and safe breast cancer approach for older patients.

### **3-minute thesis student award winner: Nicholas Choo, Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute**

Prostate cancer often becomes resistant to current drugs, so we need new treatments. Using culture and preclinical models of patient tissue, Nicholas is testing the combinations of different treatments to use them simultaneously to boost killing of prostate cancer cells.