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Eyes predict cardiovascular disease

Melbourne researcher wins Amgen Medical Researcher Award

Young clinician and research scientist Professor Tien Wong from the Centre for Eye Research, University of Melbourne, has developed a smarter way of predicting your risk of cardiovascular disease by simply looking into your eyes.

Professor Wong has been recognised for this outstanding research and his remarkable track record by winning the Amgen Medical Researcher Award. The award was judged by an independent panel of experts.

The Award will be presented to Professor Wong at an ASMR Medical Research Week® luncheon today in Sydney.

The narrowing of blood vessels in your eyes can predict your risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes & high blood pressure

Professor Wong's research has identified a novel method to assess the risk of cardiovascular disease, based on blood vessel damage in your eyes, by a simple and non invasive examination. Wong says "The imaging techniques are very sensitive, and are able to measure subtle changes in blood vessels. These can tell us that disease is developing."

Wong says that "changes in blood vessels in the eye may identify people who are at risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and hypertension. These conditions are the most common cause of death, disability and hospitalisation in Australia and worldwide and therefore the potential impact of this research is timely and significant".

Heart disease claims the lives of more than 50,000 Australians per year (38% of all deaths). Around 3.7 million Australian are affected by heart disease¹. This figure is predicted to double over the next 10 years as our population ages. At present, heart failure costs the Australian Government \$4 billion per annum in direct costs (including hospitalisation, drugs & home care)².

Wong and his team conducted the research between 2000-2006, involving more than 20,000 patients. Wong's research is ongoing, supported by the NHMRC, NIH, several Foundations, and a \$2 million grant from the Victorian Government for multidisciplinary collaborative research. His international links with 15 research institutes and hospitals in Australia, Singapore and the US are outstanding, providing an exemplary platform to showcase Australian medical research.

Professor Wong went on to say, "This work highlights the enormous potential for Australian medical research to contribute to greatly improved health outcomes for Australians. The flow-on effects of this will be a reduction in the burden of disease and the considerable economic impact of these diseases." Early diagnosis substantially reduces longterm health costs.

Dr Trevor Tingate, Executive Medical Director of Amgen Australia, who presented the award today, emphasized that "Amgen is pleased to further Australia's medical research, and ultimately impact patients, by sponsoring these types of awards".

This is the 8th national Amgen Medical Researcher Award, presented annually during ASMR Medical Research Week®, in which Amgen Australia Pty. Ltd. recognises an exceptional individual early in their medical research career.

¹ Heart, Stroke and Vascular Disease, Australian Facts 2004 – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare / National Heart Foundation of Australia

² The Shifting Burden of Cardiovascular Disease in Australia (2005), prepared for the National Heart Foundation of Australia by Access Economics.

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