

ASMR Medical Research Week® June 2 - 9

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## Eyes predict cardiovascular disease

## Melbourne researcher wins \$50,000 prize

Young clinician and medical research scientist Assoc 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.

Assoc Professor Wong has been recognised for this outstanding research and his remarkable track record by winning the coveted national award for research excellence – the Commonwealth Health Minister's Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research. The award was judged by an independent panel of experts.

The Award will be presented to Assoc Professor Wong at the ASMR Medical Research Week® Gala dinner tonight in Melbourne.

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

Wong's research has identified a novel method to assess your risk of cardiovascular disease based on blood vessel damage of 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 vessel damage".

Wong says that "changes in blood vessels in the eye may identify people who may be 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 Australian per year or 38% of all deaths. Around 3.7 million Australian are affected by heart disease<sup>1</sup>. 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 2000-2005 which involved more than 20,000 patients. Wong's research is ongoing and is supported by a \$2 million grant from the Victorian Government to conduct multidisciplinary collaborative research and links with 15 research institutes and hospitals in Australia and the US.

Assoc 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."

For interviews with Assoc Professor Wong, contact: Dr Sarah Meachem: 0412 640 774 or Catherine West: 0415 928 211 Media materials available from www.asmr.org.au/media/

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Heart. Stroke and Vascular Disease, Australian Facts 2004 – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare / National Heart Foundation of Australia

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Shifting Burden of Cardiovascular Disease in Australia (2005) report prepared for the National Heart Foundation of Australia by Access Economics.