

## Announcing the Winners of the Queensland Premier's Awards for Health and Medical Research

The Office of Health and Medical Research, Queensland Health, recognises the importance of fostering excellence in health and medical research and are proud sponsors of the 2009 Queensland Premier's Awards for Health and Medical Research

### Postgraduate Student Award- **Dr Geoffrey Faulkner** Institute for Molecular Bioscience, UQ **Retrotransposons are global regulators of gene expression in mammals**

Retrotransposons are genetic elements that have populated mammalian genomes via a copy-and-paste mechanism to such an extent that they comprise at least 50% of the human genome. Although erroneously dubbed "junk DNA" by some researchers in the past, retrotransposons in fact helped the human genome evolve and are now recognized to affect the function of thousands of genes when they occur in close proximity to those genes. It has also been noted that retrotransposons can insert themselves within genes and cause numerous diseases, such as breast cancer and haemophilia, and that the complement of retrotransposons differs substantially between individuals. The work is also of major biomedical relevance because many regulatory retrotransposons were found to occur next to genes associated with disease susceptibility in humans.

### Post-Doctoral Award – **Dr Matthias Francois** Institute for Molecular Bioscience, UQ **Research in lymphatic vessels biology and relevance in novel cancer treatment**

Lymphatic vessels are a vital component of the cardiovascular system and serve several functions critical for fetal development and adult health, such as collecting fluids from the tissues and transporting immune cells. We have identified a gene (*Sox18*) that controls the mechanism by which lymphatic vessels develop in the embryo. Understanding how lymphatic vessels grow in the embryo is crucial because the reactivation of lymphatic vessel growth in adults is the mechanism that enables tumours to spread. Our discovery provides solid ground to develop new ways that will improve cancer treatments by preventing cancer cells from colonising the body.

### Senior Post-Doctoral Award – **Dr Stuart Macgregor**, QIMR

**Common sequence variants on chromosome 20q11.22 confer melanoma susceptibility.** Melanoma is the deadliest skin cancer and is a major public health concern in Australia. Early detection and treatment is critical to outcomes in affected individuals. An understanding of the genetic factors influencing risk of developing melanoma is crucial to the identification of at-risk individuals. By identifying a set of genetic variants underlying the genetic risk, early detection (and hence treatment) of the disease can be improved. The major finding was that common genetic variants (on chromosome 20), carried by 1 in 6 in the Caucasian population, almost double melanoma risk. As well as better assessment of risk, characterization of the identified genetic variants involved in disease initiation and progression may also lead to the development of new treatments.

#### Runners Up

#### Postgraduate Student Award

**Ms Kate Markey**, QIMR

**Dr Henry Tsao**, University of Queensland

#### Post-Doctoral Award

**Dr Brian McEvoy**, QIMR

**Dr Nicole Cloonan**, IMB, University of Queensland

#### Senior Post-Doctoral Award

**Dr Glen Boyle**, QIMR

**Dr Patricia Valery**, QIMR

News Editors/Chiefs of Staff, please note:

**WHAT:** Queensland Premier's Awards for Health and Medical Research

**WHEN:** Awards Presentation 8:20pm at the ASMR MRW® Gala Dinner

**WHERE:** Sebel and Citigate Hotel, King George Square

**WHO:** Winners Queensland Premier's Awards

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Media resource material available from: <http://www.asmr.org.au/MRWMedia.html>

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