PROFESSORS GEOFF MCFADDEN AND ANDY WATERS DISCUSS THE EVIMALAR AND OZEMALAR MALARIA RESEARCH NETWORKS

# OzMalNet and OzEMalaR

ON 25 February 2010 The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) – European Union (EU) Collaborative Research Grants scheme supporting Australian participation in leading international collaborative research under FP7 were announced. One of these was awarded to Geoff McFadden (University of Melbourne), Kevin Saliba (Australian National University) and colleagues, who were successful in their project grant application for Australia - Europe Malaria Research Co-operation – OzEMalaR – and were awarded AU$830,000 (~€588,000) over five years.

Malaria is a global problem with no single solution. A large, but sometimes disjointed research community is addressing the problem, but more collaboration is vital. OzEMalaR will link 49 Australian labs with 47 European, African and Indian malaria researchers. Funding will enable the exchange of modern technologies by supporting early career researchers (PhD and postdocs) from Australia to work and be trained in top European labs. European trainees will work and be trained by Australian malariologists using reciprocal EU support (OzMalNet).

On World Malaria Day 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported: "Malaria still kills an estimated 660,000 people worldwide, mainly children under five years of age in sub-Saharan Africa. Every year, more than 200 million cases occur; most of these cases are never tested or registered. A recent plateauing of international funding has slowed down progress, and emerging drug and insecticide resistance threaten to reverse recent gains."

Malaria causes much suffering for people living in tropical and subtropical regions of the world. Much of the research focuses on finding new drugs or drug targets and vaccine development.

## Goals

OzEMalaR aims to promote and facilitate interaction between colleagues, peers and potential research partners, communicate the scientific achievements of OzEMalaR participants, and create professional development opportunities for them, in particular for postgraduate students and early career postdoctoral fellows.

Approximately 50 lab heads make up the OzEMalaR network, and contact details for their labs and research staff and students can be found on the website www.ozemalar.org/registry.

We use our website, Facebook page and Twitter to communicate malaria news from Australia and around the world to OzEMalaR participants. OzEMalaR news also features in the regular newsletters for the Australian Society for Parasitology Inc. www.parasite.org.au.

## Travel Award Scheme

Since the OzEMalaR Travel Award Scheme started in 2010, 42 Australian malaria researchers have been awarded a total of $341,064 to participate in researcher exchanges and training programmes in European laboratories within EVIMalaR. Many state that it is one of the most rewarding scientific experiences of their research careers. Over the past three years, OzEMalaR researchers have completed research exchanges in 21 European institutions.

## EVIMalaR OzMalNet exchange

Whilst malaria remains a prevalent global problem, collaboration within the research community is fundamental to future developments. The EVIMalaR OzMalNet exchange programme is an opportunity for malaria researchers to undertake research, and to work and train in Australian labs. The programme is aimed at providing funding for PhD and early career postdoctoral fellows from Europe, Africa and India as part of their current project, for a period of up to three months.

With funding support from the European Commission, the EVIMalaR OzEMalaR exchange links are between over 80 EVIMalaR lab groups and 34 top Australian labs, all members of the Australian Society for Parasitology.

OzMalNet also funded 24 early stage researchers from within the EVIMalaR community to take part in a 'joint imaging techniques' workshop this summer in Sydney, led by Cynthia Whitchurch, Lynn Turnbull (University of Technology, Sydney (UTS)) and Alister Craig (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK (LSTM))

At the moment, it seems unlikely the European Commission will offer to fund a continuation of this network, as the Network of Excellence initiative will be dropped from their research portfolio. Without support, this beneficial exchange opportunity will simply disappear, and all the tangible benefits and achievements will fade away.

Both OzMalNet and OzEMalaR are open for applications. Please contact the websites for further information.

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