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Multiple awards at AusBiotech

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A number of major awards, including some sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry, were presented at AusBiotech 2009 during the week.

Research into the potentially lethal relationship between influenza virus and pneumococcal pathogen and a possible cancer cluster in indigenous women both won the inaugural GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Australia - Biota Holdings Post Graduate Support Grant.

Ms Kirsty Short and her supervisor Dr Odilia Wijberg from the University of Melbourne, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, were granted the award for their research into understanding the potential lethal synergism that appears to exist between the influenza virus and the pneumococcal pathogen that can result in otitis media, pneumonia and meningitis in children.

Ms Sarah Tan and her supervisor Prof Suzanne Garland from the Centre for Infectious Diseases at the Royal Womens Hospital in Melbourne were granted the award for their research investigating the cause of an identified epidemic of vulval cancer in young indigenous women living in remote parts of the Northern Territory.

Each award is valued at \$25,000 over two years, and is part of the Post Graduate Support Grants Program launched by GSK in 2005 to assist PhD or Post Doctorate students in the field of human health.

GSK was also involved in student awards presented at the conference opening with Tony Carlisle from Flinders University in South Australia receiving the inaugural AusBiotech Student Association (ABSA)-GSK National Award for his research into a nasogastric tube insertion simulator.

Dr Greg Collier, ChemGenex CEO, received the AusBiotech 2009 Chairman's Excellence Award for outstanding contribution by an individual within a company.

ChemGenex is the first Australian company to submit a New Drug Application to the US Food and Drug Administration for a cancer medicine with **Omapro** (omacetaxine mepesuccinate) for the treatment of patients with chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML) who have failed treatment with the drug imatinib and who have developed the T315I mutation. Patients with this mutation do not respond to existing therapies, and in clinical trials Omapro has been shown to be effective in 85% of patients with chronic phase CML.

The award for company excellence in biotechnology went to Melbourne-based biotech Acrux with CEO Richard Treagus accepting the AusBiotech/Roche 2009 Excellence Award.

Acrux's announcement of successful Phase III results for lead product Axiron makes it one of a small number of Australian companies to have achieved this milestone. Axiron is in development as the first medicine of its kind to treat men with testosterone deficiency, and is applied to the underarm in a similar way to a deodorant.

"It is wonderful to see an Australian company and AusBiotech member leading in this way and proves that an Australian company has the capacity and capability to take a product to Phase III on its own," said Dr Anna Lavelle, CEO of AusBiotech.

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