



Media release

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National award encourages bio-science student researchers

A key challenge for the bio-sciences sector is to keep its best research graduates in science and in Australia. The national student awards recognise and encourage promising research students and raise awareness of biosciences research translation and applications.

The national prize of the *AusBiotech—GSK Student Excellence Awards*, was presented this morning at the official opening of AusBiotech 2011 by Dr Camilla Chong, Medical Director of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Australia.

The winner of the prize, Foteini Hassiotou of the University of Western Australia, was the recipient of research into stem cell therapies - a promising and rapidly developing field which forms the foundation of numerous treatments and new hope for curing previously fatal diseases.

Ms Hassiotou's research has identified that the human breast milk contains embryonic-like stem cells, which are able to differentiate towards various body cell types, including bone, fat, liver and brain cells. These cells can be accessed ethically and non-invasively from breast milk.

"When I started this project I had no idea that these cells could turn into many different cell types of the body, so initially I examined whether they could become breast-specific cells, but then I had this idea to test to see if they could also become other cell types," said Ms Hassiotou. "We have discovered that these cells have the ability to become so many other things, such as neurons, bone cells, liver cells, pancreatic insulin-producing cells and other cells of the body."

"This award will give me an opportunity to participate in an international conference, present findings and interact with world leaders and learn from them, which is an excellent start for my future research endeavors. It also provides a good basis for me to apply for further funding. I am very pleased to see that other people are recognising the importance of these findings and the potential for a number of applications."

AusBiotech continues to support and encourage student researchers and values the contribution they make to the biotechnology industry.

"Many of our member companies in the research space need talented scientists in order to progress the development of their treatments and innovations, but they are scratching around for good quality employees," says Dr Anna Lavelle, CEO AusBiotech. "We need to recognise our talent, encourage young scientists to stay in science and also help them



stay in Australia. This year's winner shows a promising future for the Australian biotechnology sector."

Medical research has come a long way in the last hundred years, yet there are still many diseases for which there are no effective treatments. Dr Camilla Chong, Medical Director of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Australia, the award sponsor said: "We're a company with a strong history of scientific innovation which is why we are very proud to sponsor these awards. On behalf of GSK, I would like to congratulate Ms Hassiotou on winning the award."

The national winner will receive a \$7,000 travel grant to be used to present their research at an international conference. In addition, the national winner's principal supervisor will receive a \$2,000 research grant.

The AusBiotech-GSK Student Excellence Awards also recognised state recipients. The winners were:

NSW: Vidya Perera (University of Sydney), for research into 'CYP1A2 activity in South Asians and Europeans.' Variability in response poses a challenge for clinicians when prescribing the correct dose of a medicine. The drug metabolising enzyme CYP1A2 contributes to the metabolism of many antipsychotic medications and developing medicines, and demonstrates wide variability, influenced by common diet and lifestyle factors. Vidya is a student of the Peter Coates Postgraduate Scholarship in Ethnopharmacology, which is supported by GSK.

Queensland: Jana McCaskill (University of Queensland), for research in developing a new drug delivery system that achieves efficient delivery of an anti-viral drug to the infected cells in the respiratory system. This potentially offers a superior means to treat acute respiratory viral infections.

South Australia: Jing Jing Wang (Flinders University), for research into '*In vitro* anti-skin cancer properties and mechanisms of action of xanthenes from the mangosteen pericarp.' This research has revealed a possibility for novel treatment of skin cancers, a cancer that now represents 30% of newly diagnosed cancers worldwide and is the most common cancer in Australia.

Tasmania: Ramez Alhazzaa (University of Tasmania), for research into 'Alternative sources of omega-3 in aquaculture.' Plant oils and plant-derived ingredients are renewable sources and can be included in our diet and have a great potential in replacing fish oil, which is finite.

Victoria: Lina Happo (Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and the University of Melbourne), for research into why certain cancers do not respond to conventional chemotherapy, highlighting the potential to predict treatment success or failure in patients with tumours by identifying genetic alterations.



AusBiotech 2011 is the annual conference of AusBiotech and the premier biotechnology and life sciences conference for Australia and the Asia-Pacific, attracting over 1,400 delegates from across the world each year and is renowned for its agenda-setting programs.

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is a global research-based pharmaceutical and healthcare company with a proud history in Australia dating back to 1886. We collaborate with local researchers and doctors to discover new ways of treating and preventing disease, investing around \$56 million a year in research and development. We currently have over 30 discovery projects underway and our Medicines Research Unity is the only Phase 1 facility supported by a pharmaceutical company in Australia.

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