



From left: (front row) Research nurse Brigit Willder, Dr Lena Ly, Associate Professor John Kelly, Dr Alex Chamberlain, (back row) Dr Yan Pan, Dr Hussain Hilmy, Dr Benjamin Wallis, clinical assistant Renate Hodgson and Dr Desmond Gan.



MELANOMA SERVICE

Head: Associate Professor John Kelly MDBS, FACD

Research conducted by the Victorian Melanoma Service is primarily clinical and aimed at facilitating earlier detection of melanoma. Early detection of melanoma remains the primary method to prevent mortality as there is still no therapy, other than complete removal of the primary tumour, with a clear survival benefit.

In 2008 Dr Hugh Roberts completed his review of the epidemiology of melanoma in Victoria over the past 20 years, working with the Victorian Cancer Registry. He studied pathology reports for more than 10,000 melanomas. His work shows that melanoma rates have doubled over the past 15 years and that this includes an increase in rates of advanced melanomas. The most important contributor by far to deaths from melanoma proved to be nodular melanoma, an uncommon, aggressive and under-recognised form of melanoma, which has been an important focus of our research. Dr Roberts showed that this form of melanoma comprises only 8% of melanomas but causes half of deaths from melanoma. In recent years Dr Alex Chamberlain and Dr Wendy Liu have pioneered understanding of this form of melanoma, describing its distinctive appearances, its risk factor profile and rapid growth.

Dr Yan Pan studied 117 patients who presented with melanoma that had spread to other parts of the skin through vessels. His is the first study to show that, contrary to assumptions made in the current melanoma staging system, these patients have a much better outlook than those with other forms of spread from melanoma. The current staging system for melanoma mistakenly indicates that patients with spread of melanoma to the skin are similar to patients with spread to internal organs and have a poor outlook, with only 19% expected to survive for five years. Dr Pan showed that these patients have a much better outlook, with half surviving for five years. This information will allow revision of the staging system and a different and more accurate prognosis that can be given to patients with spread to the skin.

Dr Lena Ly identified a new precursor for melanoma. She worked with a group of six patients who have large numbers of moles that are focused in a well-defined but large area of abnormal skin. All had developed between one and four melanomas in the affected skin. Patients with this characteristic but rare problem will be followed in future to detect their melanomas early.

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A structured telephone questionnaire was administered to men and women recently diagnosed with chlamydia to identify areas where assistance with PN would be useful. The Let Them Know website www.letthemknow.org.au was developed as a result of this study to assist heterosexual people diagnosed with chlamydial infections in informing their partner who may be at risk of infection (J Bilardi, C Hopkins, C Fairley, F Bowden, M Pitts, M Chen).

Dr Victoria Pearce completed the development of a predictive model for risk of developing melanoma. She is producing an online tool to enable people to assess their own five year risk to develop melanoma. This will enable doctors and patients to more effectively target early detection strategies.

The Melbourne Melanoma Project commenced in 2008 and involves tissue banking for melanoma. This is a collaborative project between Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, The Alfred and the Austin Hospital. The project will enable identification of the molecular pathways involved in each patient's melanoma, opening the opportunity for targeted chemotherapy.

Dr Cate Scarff joined the staff of the Victorian Melanoma Service to perform research using the new confocal microscope purchased in 2008 with support from the Muriel and Les Batten Foundation.

CURRENT PROJECTS

- The effectiveness of different biopsy types in detecting melanoma (Dr Jonathan Ng)
- Multicentre sentinel lymphadenectomy trial II (Mr Richard Bloom)
- Trial of ipilimumab for stage II melanoma (Dr Andrew Haydon)
- Prognosis for patients with regional cutaneous metastases (Dr Yan Pan)
- Changes in the epidemiology of melanoma in Victoria over 20 years (Dr Hugh Roberts)
- The features and associations of isolated dermal melanoma (Dr Sarah Brennan)
- The efficacy of imiquimod and the treatment of lentigo maligna (Dr Martin Haskett)
- Mathematical model to predict five year risk for the development of melanoma (Dr Victoria Pearce)
- Comparative study of the epidemiology of nodular melanoma, lentigo maligna melanoma and superficial spreading melanoma (Dr Wendy Liu)
- Efficacy of confocal microscopy in the non-invasive diagnosis of melanoma (Dr Cate Scarff)

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

1 Masters Student

PUBLICATIONS

2 Journal Articles

HIV research

The centre participated in a multinational clinical trial (STEAL) comparing two commonly used anti-HIV combination pills, truvada and kivexa. The most important finding was that drug combinations were equivalent in their ability to control HIV. Other ongoing studies include a trial of a nutritional supplement, safety data collection for maraviroc and continuous participation in a national observational database.