MEDIA RELEASE

Medal Celebrates Groundbreaking Stroke Research and Leadership

This year’s prestigious Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation (BGRF) medal will be awarded to Professor Geoffrey Donnan for his outstanding contribution to international stroke research at a function on Thursday 10 July 2008.

The Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation celebrates Professor Donnan’s single minded leadership in stroke research over three decades. ‘His commitment has dramatically changed outcomes for stroke patients and driven unprecedented levels of research into stroke prevention and new treatments,’ said Foundation Chairman Michael Kiely.

Although stroke is more common than heart attack in western populations, it hasn’t traditionally attracted the same levels of funding. The perception is that stroke is confined to an older population, but the reality is that it can strike at any age, even in childhood.

The big breakthrough was the development of medical imaging. Professor Donnan realised the potential of medical imaging to unlock the secrets of the brain. A powerful advocate, he was able to attract funding and build a team to exploit this technology to develop new therapeutic strategies such as clot dissolving agents.

‘These agents deliver some of the most powerful biological effects in medicine today offering complete recovery to an additional 30 per cent of stroke victims, previously facing permanent incapacitation’, Mr Kiely explained.

An influential advocate and truly international figure, Professor Donnan has established an Australia-wide network for clinical trials in stroke which has served as a model for the establishment of similar networks around the world.

The Foundation also commends Professor Donnan’s role as the founding Director of the National Stroke Institute where he mentored several generations of research fellows who have gone on to make a worldwide contribution to improving research and the clinical management of stroke victims.

Despite these outstanding achievements, Professor Donnan has a new mission. His work on determining the duration of the brain’s survival after stroke has enormous potential to change the outcomes for thousands of stroke sufferers all
over the world. Having dispelled the long-held notion that the brain dies within a few hours of serious stroke, Professor Donnan and his team proved that the brain can survive up to 48 hours, creating a window of opportunity to apply potential therapies.

‘The bottom line is that this work will make it possible for more people to recover from serious stroke’, said Professor Donnan. ‘The challenge is to extend the efficacy of existing medication beyond the current short three hour time limit so more people can actually walk away from stroke.’

The Foundation awards this medal for an outstanding contribution to clinical research in progressive neurological disorders or palliative care. Past winners have included the cream of Australia’s research community such as Professor Ian Maddocks, Professor Claude Bernard, Professor Frederick Mendelsohn, and Professor Colin Masters.

The Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation was established in 1994 through a very generous bequest from the estate of the late Mr Glen W A Griffiths, in appreciation for the care he received at Calvary Health Care Bethlehem for motor neuron disease (MND). His will provided for the establishment of a foundation, independent of the hospital, to fund Victorians researching life-threatening illnesses such as multiple sclerosis and MND as well as palliative care. New methods of treatment resulting from the nearly $3 million provided since it commenced are now used routinely to alleviate suffering.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Professor Geoffrey Donnan, please contact Julienne Lewis on 0409 513 443 or at commedge@iprimus.com.au