

21 November 2019

VIERTEL FOUNDATION AWARDS \$4.1M TO MEDICAL RESEARCH

\$3.75M IN RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS PLUS \$425,000 TO CLINICAL INVESTIGATORS

The prestigious annual Viertel Senior Medical Research Fellowships have been announced for 2019 committing just over \$3.75 million to three mid-career Australian researchers undertaking leading edge research into immunology and infectious diseases, as well as its role of the immune microenvironment in cancer.

The 2019 Senior Medical Research Fellows are:

1. Professor Andrew Steer - Murdoch Children's Research Institute
2. Dr Tracy Putoczki - Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research
3. Dr Richard Berry - Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute.

Each Fellow receives \$1.25 million (\$250,000 per year for five years) to support their important work informing the development of new therapies in their areas of specialisation.

"Medical research, and many innovations to advance our community, social, economic and health wellbeing, rely on philanthropy. For nearly 25 years Sylvia and Charles Viertel's legacy has been honoured through the fellowships and the establishment of an impressive alumni of medical researchers," said Jodi Kennedy, General Manager of Charitable Trusts and Philanthropy, Equity Trustees.

"The Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation funds two of the Fellowships. We were delighted this year to bring together the Viertel funding with additional funds from two other charitable trusts we manage, the Cross Family Trust and the Frank Alexander Charitable Trust, to make a third fellowship possible," she said.

In addition, five \$85,000 one-year clinical investigation scholarships were awarded to:

1. Dr Jun Yang - Hudson Institute of Medical Research
2. Dr Amali Mallawaarachchi - The Garvan Institute of Medical Research
3. Dr Nidhi Garg - The University of Sydney
4. Dr Mastura Monif - Monash University
5. Dr Andrew Neal - Monash University.

Professor Peter Leedman, Chairman of the Viertel Foundation's Medical Advisory Board, revealed that the 2019 applications for both the Fellowships and the clinical investigations scholarships, were of an extremely high standard.

"Each year we are impressed by the quality of the candidates and the incredible work they are doing in pursuit of new diagnostics, treatments and preventative strategies for some of our most intractable medical problems," said Professor Leedman.

The Viertel Foundation is managed in partnership with co-trustees Justice Debra Mullins AO (Chair), Rex Freudenberg and Paul de Silva, and is one of Australia's largest charitable foundations distributing around \$7.5 million annually.

Click the link for more about the [Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation](#).



MEDIA INQUIRIES

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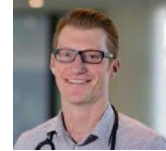


2019 VIERTEL SENIOR MEDICAL FELLOWS

Professor Andrew Steer

Public health interventions for control of tropical infections

Professor Steer leads a broad research program on novel approaches to the prevention and control of poverty-related tropical infectious diseases, particularly Strep A disease and neglected tropical diseases including scabies. He leads a world-first human infection study of Strep A pharyngitis which will soon be used as a platform to test new vaccines, and a series of world-first community-based trials of mass drug administration for the control of neglected tropical diseases. Strep A is a significant cause of death globally, especially due to rheumatic heart disease. Scabies affects more than 200 million people worldwide. Both infections disproportionately affect indigenous Australians. Professor Steer's work aims to accelerate the development of Strep A vaccines and expand the evidence base for community control of scabies and other neglected tropical diseases.



Professor Steer is a paediatric infectious diseases physician at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne; Director of the Infection and Immunity Theme, and Group Leader of the Tropical Diseases Research Group at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute; and Professorial Research Fellow in the Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne.

Dr Tracy Putoczki

Untangling the role of cytokines in cancer progression

Cancer constitutes a major disease burden in Australia. While our understanding of the genetic landscape of cancer has evolved over the last decade, we are only just beginning to appreciate how other cells within the tumour microenvironment contribute to disease progression. The tumour microenvironment is composed of immune cells and other supporting cells, which shape the adaptive immune response to the tumour and influence cancer development. Dr Putoczki's research investigates the role of immune-signalling cytokines (specifically interleukin-11) in promoting tumour cell survival, invasion, and spread, and how they impact tumour response or resistance to chemotherapeutics and targeted therapies.



Dr Putoczki is a laboratory head in the Personalised Oncology division at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. She is a recipient of the inaugural Australian Society of Medical Research Peter Doherty Leading Light Award.

Dr Richard Berry*

How viruses and tumours escape cellular immunity

Our immune system is uniquely equipped to detect foreign invaders and abnormal cells. However, viral infections and cancer remain extremely prevalent within the human population, where they create significant burden to the health and wellbeing of society and remain persistently resilient due to their remarkable ability to hide from our immune system. Understanding how they do this has been critical to recent breakthrough success of cancer immunotherapy. Dr Berry aims to build on this body of work through investigating cytomegaloviruses (CMV), a group of widespread and potentially deadly pathogens that have evolved an arsenal of 'immuno-evasins' - molecules whose sole function is to dampen host immunity. Identifying the mechanisms by which CMV mediates immune escape will lead to the development of novel strategies to boost the ability of the immune system to combat human diseases.



Dr Berry is an NHMRC Career Development Fellow and Group Leader within the Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute. He is a previous recipient of two NHMRC fellowships, an IUBMB Young Scientist Program Fellowship and a Lorne Protein Young Investigator Award.

**Viertel, Cross Family and Frank Alexander Senior Medical Research Fellow*