



THE VICTOR CHANG
CARDIAC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Constructing the complexity of life - from egg to adult

Over 900 developmental biologists meet in Sydney today to launch an international congress that aims to address how our bodies are shaped and how our organs are built – how we grow from a single-celled egg into a trillion-celled adult.

The 15th International Society of Developmental Biologists Congress runs over the next four days and has attracted world leaders in developmental biology, including Nobel Laureate, Professor Sydney Brenner.

This year's Congress is organised by senior scientists at the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, led by Professor Richard Harvey, who says that developmental biology is fundamentally the study of life, from the fertilisation of a single-celled egg to the development of adult form and function. However, it also has important ramifications later in life, in terms of the ability of our cells, tissue and organs to regenerate and in regards to the genetic causes of disease.

"One of the most exciting outcomes in the study of developmental biology over the last decade is stem cell biology; the discipline of understanding how immature cells expand and are held in limbo, until they are needed and can then go on to form more complex and specialised cells during development and regeneration."

"If we can get to a point where we understand how stem cells are activated and renew themselves, we might be able to control the processes of regeneration to combat degenerative diseases," Professor Harvey says. "But we have a long road ahead of us and first we need to do the basic research to understand the fundamental principles that underlie development."

This year's congress has attracted over 900 delegates, 63% from the Asia-Pacific region. "The Congress gives us the chance to bring leaders in the field together to showcase their work and discuss the future of the discipline. It is also an opportunity to share information and ideas and to foster collaborative work."

"Australia is a strong contender on the international stage of developmental biology, leading the way with important advances in evolutionary biology, embryonic patterning, organ development and adult stem cell research," Prof. Harvey said.

During the Congress, the Asia-Pacific Developmental Biology Network will be inaugurated, which will unite and give a voice to scientists of the region, and provide them with a means to share their knowledge and support the discipline within the region. The next Congress will be held in 2009, the exact location will be announced during the week. A list of sessions and topics open to media are available on request.

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