

Media Release

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PRIME MINISTER GILLARD HONOURS THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH AT THE ANNUAL VICTOR CHANG CARDIAC RESEARCH INSTITUTE BALL

The extraordinary achievements of Australia's leading medical researchers were honoured tonight at the annual Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute (VCCRI) Ball at the Sydney Convention Centre, attended by Prime Minister Gillard who had flown in from Perth to attend the event.

Joined by more than 750 guests, the star-studded occasion was also attended by two very special guests, both of whom owe their lives to medical science and the vital research work carried out at the VCCRI coalface.

Media technology guru, Peter Blasina, better known as The Gadget Man, underwent a successful emergency quadruple by-pass earlier this year. Peter was seated at a table with George Constantinou, Australia's 67th heart transplant patient who at the age of 21, was operated on by legendary cardiac transplant surgeon Victor Chang.

Executive Director of the VCCRI, Professor Bob Graham, reminded the audience that heart disease was still the greatest killer of Australians and the work carried out at the Institute was vital for the ongoing health of the nation.

"Australian scientists from VCCRI are amongst the leaders in the world in cardiac research and have been so for many years," Professor Graham said. "Peter Blasina and George Constantinou are testaments to the achievements of the organisation.

"The past 12 months has seen VCCRI again produce three world-first discoveries, with papers published in the most prestigious and widely-read biomedical research journals – Cell, Nature Structural Biology and Nature."

Professor Graham said the Prime Minister's attendance at the dinner recognised the vital role medical research plays in preventing heart disease.

University researchers receive 60 cents in a dollar to pay for indirect costs; medical research institutes receive less than 30 cents in the dollar to pay for indirect costs.

VCCRI Chairman, Steven Lowy AM, said heart disease claimed the life of one Australian every 11 minutes.

"Quite simply, it takes more lives than most other diseases combined and importantly, it kills four times more women than breast cancer.

“In the face of these facts, it is easy to become despondent. But we are making progress. Every one of the past 16 years of the life of the Institute has been marked by at least one major discovery in a wide-ranging area of heart disease biology.

“Since last year, our researchers have published 128 research papers as well as eight book chapters. This is just one indicator of the incredible output generated by the amazing staff of the VCCRI,” he said.

Ninety cents out of every dollar donated for VCCRI goes directly into funding medical research.

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About the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute

Established in 1994, the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute (VCCRI) is committed to excellence into heart disease and cardiovascular biology, cardiovascular research training and facilitating the rapid application of research discoveries to patient care. In Australia alone, heart muscle diseases - the cause of heart failure - are responsible for the death of over 130,000 people annually with 400 new cases being added each week. For more information visit www.victorchang.edu.au

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