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Freemasons Support of New Tissue Bank a Major Step Forward in Cancer Research



Freemasons Roskill Foundation are the founding sponsor of a new tissue bank to be established at Middlemore Hospital in Auckland, expected to be a major step forward in advancing medical research in New Zealand.

The official launch of the tissue bank was marked by a function at the hospital on Friday last week attended by Foundation Trustees, other senior Auckland Freemasons as well as senior management of Counties Manukau District Health Board.

The tissue bank will collect and store human tumour-related biospecimens for the translational research required in understanding disease processes and in new cancer drug development. The results from translational studies can tell researchers if a new treatment or laboratory test should be tried on people. Results from this type of research have been spectacularly successful in recent times leading to the development of medicines such as Herceptin (for breast cancer), Glivec (for chronic myeloid leukaemia) and Rituximab (for lymphoma) which radically improve patient outcomes.

The medical research community in Auckland has greeted the tissue bank plan with excitement and enthusiasm and the proposed venture has also aroused interest and indications of support from Australia and USA. The only other general tissue bank presently in New Zealand is in Christchurch.

The initiative for a tissue bank in Auckland comes from its future governing body the Centre for Clinical Research and Effective Practice. CCREP is a charitable trust associated with Counties Manukau District Health Board and the manager of current research at the hospital.

Freemasons Roskill Foundation Chairman, MWBro David Mace said, "The basis of our community support is in medical research evidenced by our associations with the University of Auckland medical school with their neurological work and with our Chair of Gerontology. We believe the tissue bank has huge potential to give both our scientists and patients great faith in the future. We are delighted to be in the forefront of this project."

It is expected the tissue bank will begin functioning by December 2009 with sample collection beginning 12 months after that. The tissue bank will move into its own premises on a Middlemore site next year.

In particular, tissue material which is specifically related to the ethnic diversities in the New Zealand population will become available. The preservation of these cancerous tissues at Middlemore will allow future researchers to investigate the differences current cancer drugs and therapies have in Maori and Pacific Islanders, where little is published now, and possibly develop new ones.

Dr Stuart Ryan, General Manager of CCREP, said "Our vision is to establish a comprehensive regional, if not NZ-wide, collection of biospecimens. We will build and grow the Middlemore Tissue Bank over the next three years and seek collaborations with New Zealand's academic, research and public health institutions." Dr Ryan praised founding sponsor Freemasons Roskill Foundation for their bold investment enabling the vision to proceed, and their understanding of the rewards of medical research.

Dr Samar Issa has been appointed founding clinical director. She is a consultant haematologist at Middlemore Hospital and is clinical head of the Lymphoma Service and Chair of the recently established Lymphoma Network of New Zealand. Daphne Mason has been recruited to the role of Tissue Bank Curator. She has over 25 years experience in the field of pathology and laboratory management.

"The Centre has a key role in bringing new healthcare options to the New Zealand public, working closely with researchers and investigators producing evidence to support the adoption of new therapies. We look forward to supporting research projects which will deliver real benefits to New Zealand's unique patient population with its diverse ethnicities," says Dr Ryan.

Photo caption:

At the launch of the Middlemore Tissue Bank: (L to R) Dr Stuart Ryan, General Manager of CCREP and Dr Sammar Issa, inaugural Clinical Director of the Tissue Bank, with David Mace, Chairman of Freemasons Roskill Foundation.



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