



Media Statement

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Leading Australian ophthalmologist Professor David Mackey awarded 2015 Churchill Fellowship.

Lions Eye Institute Managing Director Professor David Mackey, one of the world's leading researchers in the genetics of eye disease, has received a 2015 Churchill Fellowship.

He will travel to the United Kingdom in 2016 to look at how Australian patients with rare eye diseases could participate in promising gene therapy research trials being conducted overseas.

"I have been working on the genetics of eye disease for more than 25 years and have mainly been involved in the discovery of genes associated with different eye diseases, such as optic nerve diseases, retinal dystrophies and glaucoma," Professor Mackey said.

"In the last decade, several gene therapy trials have begun in Europe and North America for some specific rare eye diseases.

"Gene therapy offers hope to patients with a range of conditions for which there have not been conventional treatments or cures.

"Although there are some people in Australia who would be eligible for involvement in these international trials, there are not enough people in Australia to justify an independent arm of these trials in our country."

Professor Mackey said the aim of his Churchill Fellowship was to learn how Australian patients could be involved in future research.

He will visit leading ophthalmic gene therapy centres in London and Oxford to evaluate their research protocols to determine what could be conducted in Australia.

“I also want to examine what barriers currently exist to patients having the treatment overseas but then being monitored in Australia as part of a truly international study,” he said.

“Ultimately, I want to create a national treatment centre that would allow patients to be monitored near their homes.”

Professor Mackey was one of 109 Australians – and 13 Western Australians – awarded a 2015 Churchill Fellowship.

The Fellowships allow talented Australians to engage globally and bring innovative ideas and solutions back to the nation.

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