

MEDIA STATEMENT

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NEW CHAIR TO PIONEER NEXT GENERATION TREATMENTS FOR EYE DISEASE

Professor Ian Constable's landmark contribution to saving sight will be recognised with the creation of new senior academic roles at The University of Western Australia.

The Ian Constable Chair in Discovery and Translational Ophthalmic Science will focus on new treatments for major blinding diseases such as cataract and macular degeneration.

UWA Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson said the new positions included a postdoctoral fellowship and continuous PhD program to attract leading international research scientists.

"Today's announcement recognises Professor Constable's legacy during a medical career spanning almost 50 years," he said.

Lions Eye Institute (LEI) Managing Director Professor David Mackey said the creation of a science-based Chair and support team would boost eye research in Western Australia.

"The LEI has a long history of translating scientific research into improved treatments for people with blinding eye disease," he said.

"There have been some major advances, such as the world's first artificial cornea, gene therapy for macular degeneration and dissolving tubes for the treatment of glaucoma.

"But the goal of saving sight continues and we need to constantly strive to develop new treatment pathways.

Professor Ian Constable said achievements by the Lions Eye Institute had pioneered major internationally funded programs.

"These translational achievements inspire us to broaden our scientific capabilities through this chair so that we can pursue other challenging blinding eye diseases," he said.

Professor Constable was appointed to the Foundation Lions Chair of Ophthalmology at UWA in 1975 at the age of just 32, having previously worked in retinal research at Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary.

Within two years of his arrival in Western Australia, he had set up the State's first ophthalmic training program. He introduced new surgical procedures for the treatment of vitreoretinal disease and spearheaded vital outreach services to remote Aboriginal communities.

In 1983, he founded the LEI – now recognised internationally as both a centre for clinical excellence and a leader in scientific research.

Today, the LEI employs more than 200 researchers, clinicians and support staff. Its research activities are supported via proceeds from one of Australia's largest ophthalmology clinics.

The new Chair is being established with the financial support of the Australian Foundation for the Prevention of Blindness (AFPB) and private donations and will be based at the LEI.

Indonesian eye specialist Dr Sjakon Tahija, who completed his vitreo-retinal fellowship at the LEI in the early 1990s, is a generous supporter of the campaign and has been named International Ambassador for the new Chair.

MEDIA REFERENCE

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