2013 in Perspective

As 2014 approaches we’re looking back at some of OII’s successes in 2013 as well as into the notoriously unpredictable technology transfer and commercialisation crystal ball.

Awards were a regular feature in 2013 and included Adjunct Professors Steve Wilton and Sue Fletcher winning the NSW Health Jamie Callachor Eureka Prize for Medical Research Translation (for their antisense treatment for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy), Associate Prof Robert McLaughlin being a finalist for the prestigious ANSTO Eureka Prize for Innovative Use of Technology (for developing a microRNA treatment for cancer).

Award-winning projects need to start somewhere and over 2013 we have assessed nearly 40 new technology opportunities (covering everything from a new accelerometer, dental instruments, and desalination technology to faster plant breeding systems). We filed a range of new provisional patent applications, and seeded ~$10k into PATHFINDER projects exploring the commercial potential of Parkinson’s Disease drug candidates, borehole televiewer software to assist with mineral exploration and an exciting source of potential future herbicides.

We’ve also received support from Commercialisation Australia for two Skills & Knowledge projects to help move UWA technologies towards being ‘investor-ready’ and secured investment from Yuuwa Capital LP to form Eridian Technology Pty Ltd, a spin out company commercialising nanoparticle drug delivery technology from the lab of Dr Swaminatha Iyer in UWA’s School of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

2013 also saw OII help many researchers to engage with industry on sponsored research projects and even started to provide direct access to our researchers through AusIndustry’s Researchers in Business scheme where researchers with particular skills can become embedded with a company to help them with their R&D efforts.

Looking ahead to 2014 we have high hopes for the ‘microscope-in-a-needle’ project attracting an investor and more industry-university engagement. A project using custom designed peptides to ‘drug the undruggable’ is also looking very promising.

But 2014 won’t be the same without the inimitable Dr Andy Sierakowski. Andy joined UWA in 2001 and has been the driving force in establishing and developing the technology transfer and commercialisation function at UWA and a constant champion of translating research into useful innovations. Andy won’t be back in 2014 but the team at OII would like to wish him ALL THE VERY BEST FOR THE FUTURE, and we’ll be in touch when we need a hand with the crossword!

Unisearch has arrived in Perth

We are pleased to announce that Unisearch Expert Opinion Services have opened their first division in Perth, operating out of The Office of Industry and Innovation premises in Love House at UWA.

Unisearch has been the leading Australian provider of independent expert opinion and advice for over 50 years. In the arrangement negotiated by the OII and Unisearch, a Unisearch staff member, Alex Attwood, will be stationed in OII premises supporting UWA academics who wish to engage with industry in both expert opinion matters as well as consulting services. The formal launch of the operations will occur in February 2014. Unisearch is an operating group under UNSW Global which is a subsidiary of UNSW.

Look for further information on this exciting new initiative in the New Year.

Pictured (L-R): John Arneil (Unisearch), Campbell Thomson (UWA), Alex Attwood (Unisearch) and Andy Sierakowski (UWA).

In this issue

- 2013 in Perspective
- Pathfinder Success! iCeutica gets FDA approval
- UWA Innovator of the Year
- Oil Seminars and Workshops:
  - UWA KPMG Innovation Breakfast Series
  - Postgraduate Workshop 2013
- Merry Christmas

Pathfinder Success! iCeutica gets FDA approval

A technology project originally developed by researchers at The University of Western Australia has secured approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration for its first drug.

The FDA has approved Zorvolex™, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug to treat mild-to-moderate acute pain in adults. Zorvolex™ was developed by iCeutica Inc, a UWA spin-out, in collaboration with its US partner, Iroko Pharmaceuticals LLC.

The original work was funded under a Pathfinder grant in 2004 and the resultant patented technology licensed to iCeutica; this was later converted to shares in the company.

Dr Andy Sierakowski, Director UWA’s Office of Industry and Innovation, stated that this project demonstrates two key points of technology transfer - the importance of pre-seed funding like Pathfinder in a university environment and the time required for a biotechnology-related invention to make it to marketplace use.
Congratulations to MiReven Pty Ltd on winning the Emerging Innovation Category for MicroRNA cancer therapeutic at the 2013 Mitsubishi Corporation WA Innovator of the Year Awards.

MiReven, a UWA spin out company formed in 2010 through an investment from the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, is a biopharmaceutical company focused on developing microRNA-7 (miR-7) as a cancer therapy.

MiReven is based on the technology of a team led by Prof. Leedman and Dr Giles at the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research (formerly known as WAIMR/UWA).

They found that miR-7 acts as a ‘tumour suppressor’ or ‘brake’ to inhibit an essential growth receptor for cancer, known as the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), as well as its associated signalling pathways that promote cancer development. The EGFR pathway is recognised as a major target for therapy in many types of cancer because it is often associated with disease progression, resistance to chemotherapy/radiation therapy, and poor prognosis.

The research group pictured (L-R): Dr Keith Giles, Ms Felicity Kalinowsk, Mr Yasuo Yamakna, Prof. Peter Leedman, Prof. Lyn Beazley (Chief Scientist of WA), Mark Pullen (Chairman - 2013 WA Innovator of the Year Awards), The Hon Michael Mischin MLC (Minister for Commerce), Dr Samantha South (MiReven Director).

The group have been working with the Office of Industry and Innovation’s Samantha South since 2011 and have seen their technology mature to a stage where further investment is required to develop the technology through the regulatory preclinical and clinical trials pathway.

Award winners were announced at an awards luncheon, held at the State Reception Centre, Kings Park on Wednesday 13 November 2013. A State Government initiative, the awards are administered through the Department of Commerce. For further information about the Innovator of the Year Award visit the Department of Commerce website: http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/ScienceInnovation/Innovator/winners_2013.htm.

**Super seminar season!**

**UWA & KPMG Innovation Series Breakfasts**

The Oil & Gas breakfast held 27 September hosted speakers Prof. Mark Cassidy, UWA (pic left) and Shaun Gregory, Woodside (pic third from left).

The next breakfast held 30 October focused on research and innovation in the field of Construction and included keynote speakers David Bylund, UWA and David Eden, Brookfield Multiplex.

The final breakfast for 2013 in Agriculture and Food held 4 December was as well attended as previous sessions. Speakers Tress Walmsley, Intergrain and included keynote speakers David Bylund, UWA and Prof. Mark Cassidy, UWA (pic left) and Shaun Gregory, Woodside (pic third from left).

The meetings run from 7.30am - 9.00am and more are planned for 2014, so stay tuned!

**Postgraduate Workshop 2013**

A near gale force wind threatened to stop the Postgraduate Workshop from going ahead, but for the intimate group who did brave the cold and windy conditions, the workshop (held 23 September) proved to be a valuable experience.

Guest speakers included Dr Penny Farbey, Associate from Wrays Pty Ltd and Winthrop Prof. Alan Dench, Dean of Graduate Research and Scholarships Office along with OII staff who were on hand to guide and inform the group about commercialisation, specific to their research.

Group activities enlightened attendees with practical knowledge about what the implications are of disclosing information about their own research as well as the impact it could have should they decide to publish or commercialise in the future.

For those who missed out, we plan on running this workshop again in future, hopefully with better weather conditions, so stay tuned!