



Media Release

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Scientist Returns to Melbourne to Research
New Therapies for Diabetes and Obesity

Minister for Innovation Announces the 2008 VESKI Innovation Fellow

Scientist, Professor Michael Cowley has been named as the 2008 VESKI Innovation Fellow - returning to his home town of Melbourne after ten years in the US as a successful researcher and bio-entrepreneur.



Gavin Jennings MLC, Minister for Innovation has today announced Professor Michael Cowley as the 2008 VESKI Innovation Fellow in collaboration with Monash University.

Professor Cowley will establish his laboratory at Monash University as part of the Monash Obesity Initiative and progress his research into a therapy that has already shown to reverse diabetes in mice (Published in Nature, September 3, 2007).

Initial research by Professor Cowley has discovered a group of neurons in the brain that detect blood sugar levels. In the case of people with diabetes in combination with obesity, the brain loses the ability to sense blood sugar, and so is unable to regulate blood sugar levels. Professor Cowley's research group has discovered a molecule based on traditional Chinese medicine which restores sugar sensing in these neurons, and reduces blood sugar levels dramatically in obese mice.

The new research at Monash is to advance these discoveries into a human therapy that allows the brain to sense glucose again, and reduce blood sugar levels in diabetics.

VESKI Chairman, Professor Snow Barlow says: "VESKI is absolutely delighted to assist in bringing Professor Cowley back to Victoria to continue this potentially transformational research into such an important area of public health".

The Head of the Department of Physiology at Monash University Professor Iain Clarke says there is no doubt that Prof Cowley's recruitment will significantly enhance the research profile of Victoria and Australia and the University's objective to become recognised for its premier research status in obesity research.

“He is a dynamic Australian with a very high international profile who will bring valuable expertise to the biotechnology industry. He is the founder of the very successful biotechnology company ‘Orexigen Therapeutics’ based in the US and will be of considerable importance for his research as well as in the greater arena of commercialization in Victoria.”

The VESKI Innovation Fellowship Program returns to Victoria successful Australian expatriates with outstanding skills in the fields of science, innovative technology and design. It is seed funded from the interest on a \$10 million endowment, announced by Treasurer and Minister for Innovation, John Brumby in 2004.

Professor Cowley says he is excited and flattered to be asked to return to Melbourne and continue his work into diabetes and obesity. “My main concern is the sicknesses that come from obesity – diabetes and hypertension - and to develop new therapies that will compliment existing treatments”.

Professor Cowley has returned to Melbourne, where he was born and educated, after ten years at the Oregon Health and Science University in Portland Oregon. He is married with two young children.

To arrange an interview with VESKI Innovation Fellow Professor Michael Cowley, Announcement Details, Media and Photos contact:

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

VESKI [Victorian Endowment for Science, Knowledge and Innovation] assists outstanding Australian scientists and leading innovators to undertake their research in Victoria and contribute to building an inspired community where innovation, ideas, and business provide benefits for Australia. VESKI is supported by the State Government of Victoria.
www.veski.org.au

