



Thursday, 21 November 2013

TOP PRIZE FOR JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY WORM RESEARCHER

Queensland Tropical Health Alliance (QTHA) researcher Dr Cinzia Cantacessi, James Cook University (JCU), Cairns has been awarded the Frank Fenner Early Career (ECR) Fellowship for research excellence in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) ECR scheme.

Dr Cinzia Cantacessi's main interest is the study of the molecular interactions occurring between parasitic worms and their mammalian hosts, with the ultimate goal of unraveling some of the clever strategies worms put into play in order to evade the host's immune system and ensure their long-term survival.

Dr Cantacessi is currently investigating the changes in the type and number of bacterial species in the guts of people who are infected with hookworm.

"I'm trying to understand what role the bacteria play when a person has a hookworm infection and how they might influence the body's reaction to this parasite," Dr Cantacessi said.

"We extract the DNA from all bacterial populations in the gut, and study it using high throughput sequencing. This technique can pick up which species of bacteria are in the gut and how abundant each of them is," Dr Cantacessi said.

"This research is important because the human intestine is a complicated system, where the hookworm parasites inevitably interact not only with the immune response, but also with the microbes inhabiting the gut. These complex interactions, together, determine whether the worms can establish themselves in the host long-term," Dr Cantacessi said.



Dr Cinzia Cantacessi was awarded the 2011 Melbourne University Chancellors Award for the best PhD thesis and has published more than 60 scientific papers. She is a senior research officer at James Cook University, at The Australian Institute of Health and Medical Research (AITHM).

For interviews please contact Lisa Jones 07 4232 1311 or email lisa.jones1@jcu.edu.au

LOCATION: The QTHA building is in the E cluster of buildings at the Cairns campus of JCU. Drive into the university grounds and turn left after the carpark. Follow the road right to the end and look for the signs for QTHA parking.

The QTHA is a unique collaboration between Queensland universities and research institutes, creating a wealth of tropical health and medical research expertise in the tropics. QTHA brings together, within one network, world-class researchers focused on the common goal of reducing the burden of tropical diseases in tropical regions. Research is conducted within three broad programs discovery, new product development and trialling of drugs, diagnostics and vaccines; Indigenous health; disease surveillance and control.

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www.qtha.org.au