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The Asthma Australia Research Program



10 December 2020

Asthma Australia names research grants in honour of Professor Peter van Asperen

Asthma Australia is honoured to announce a new round of annual grants will be available in 2021, in legacy of the late Professor Peter van Asperen, as part of the newly launched Asthma Australia Research Program.

The Peter van Asperen Career Development Grants will support three early career researchers – to the sum of two thousand dollars each – helping to boost their career in the field of asthma and respiratory research and medicine.

To apply for the Peter van Asperen Career Development Grants and to receive notifications about future funding rounds, researchers can sign-up at www.asthma.org.au/research.



About Peter van Asperen

Many people in the respiratory community and thousands of parents and children over the years would know of Professor of Paediatric Respiratory Medicine, Peter van Asperen. An internationally published researcher and author of two books focusing on asthma and children, he was one of Australia's great contributors to respiratory and asthma medicine and research. While his major personal research interest was in the area of the development and management of asthma including involvement in a large number of clinical trials in this area, he also carried out and supervised research in a variety of other respiratory disorders including cystic fibrosis and chronic neonatal lung disease.

His relationship with Asthma Australia and the then Asthma Foundations extends back to his early career which started in 1978. Through two grants from the Asthma Foundation of NSW, he was able to follow on from his first ever research study, completed for his MD, on the development of atopy in infancy and childhood commencing in 1980. It resulted in 10 publications in internationally recognised journals. This exceptional start to his productive career and connection with the then Asthma Foundation NSW research program sparked a life-long connection with Asthma Australia.

In addition, this initial research formed part of five successful PhD theses from respiratory trainees he has supervised. Three of these have had ongoing productive research careers in areas related to their PhD research, including two who worked under him in his role of Head, Department of Respiratory Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Westmead. One, whose PhD was awarded on the clinical utility of peripheral airway function tests in paediatric lung disease. He supervised many early career PhD students and fostered a high calibre of expertise into the field of respiratory and asthma, which is indicative of the nature behind the Career Development Grants which will be awarded to multiple recipients starting 2021.

His later interests in cough research developed because of the issue of over-diagnosis of asthma in children presenting with cough. He became involved in the writing of two national guidelines on management of cough.

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He was also actively involved with the Asthma Foundation of NSW (including membership of the Board and both the Medical & Scientific Advisory Committee and the Research Advisory Committee) and the National Asthma Council (NAC) and is a member of the NAC Asthma Guidelines Committee for the current revision. He has also been an invited speaker at several International Meetings, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, mainly addressing issues related to the management of both asthma and cough in children. Internationally, he also sat on several executive committees and is an advisor to and Visiting Professor at the Beijing's Children's Hospital. He was appointed as the inaugural Macintosh Professor of Paediatric Respiratory Medicine at the University of Sydney in 2005.

Peter sadly passed away in 2015 and is remembered by his wife Paula, children Danielle, Jeremy and William as well as grandchildren Archie, Ethan, Henry, Aiden, Felix, Amelia and Chloe.

"As a family we are truly touched that you have thought of Peter for these research grants. One of Peter's greatest passions was teaching the next generation of doctors as well as encouraging and mentoring their research projects.

I am sure he would have been very proud to be involved in something like this and I know the Asthma Foundation always had a special place in his heart. We are extremely grateful that you have chosen to honour him in this way. We wish all the recipients of these grants great success and a long and happy career and thank them for continuing Peter's legacy with their research projects." – Paula van Asperen

CEO of Asthma Australia Michele Goldman said it was a privilege to continue the legacy of a remarkable human being in a way that will reflect his work and passion.

"We hope the recipients of these grants will be inspired by this legacy and go on to make valuable contributions to research and practice as Peter did throughout the course of his life."

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