

# PRESS RELEASE

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## World Congress on Huntington's Disease – a Congress for a Cure

The world's foremost medical research experts will converge on Melbourne next week for the World Congress on Huntington's Disease (HD), which will feature a number of international guest speakers from more than two dozen countries discussing research, clinical updates, and strategies to deal with the disease.

In Australia alone, seven people per 100,000 suffer from the genetic brain disorder, which has no known cure, with many more at risk of inheriting the defective gene.

Associate Professor Nellie Georgiou-Karistianis, Head of the Experimental Neuropsychology Research Unit at Monash University, is conducting groundbreaking research enabling use of imaging methods to identify brain changes that occur very early before clinical symptoms manifest. Outcomes from this Australia-first research program will provide new information to be used in up-coming intervention studies to assess the effectiveness of drug therapies in forstalling this fatal disease.

"The Congress is about bringing together some of the world's greatest minds to discuss this genetic disorder as well as to provide an update of global initiatives and how we can work together in solving this great clinical mystery," said Associate Professor Georgiou-Karistianis.

"The effect of HD is enormous with each child of an affected parent having a 50 per cent chance of inheriting the defective gene. Those who inherit the HD gene eventually get the disease.

"Symptoms usually appear between the ages of 30 and 50, marked by progressive deterioration of movement and cognition eventually leading to incapacitation and death approximately 15-25 years after onset."

Also taking part in the conference is Professor Julie Stout, Head of the Clinical and Cognitive Neurosciences Laboratory at Monash University, an international leader in research on cognition in HD.

"Huntington's disease disrupts cognitive function, even years before disease diagnosis, leading to declines in the ability to work and care for oneself and one's family. Thus, a major goal of clinical trials for HD is to find treatments that can stabilise or restore cognitive function in HD," said Professor Stout.

"Many potential treatments for HD are in the pipeline, but it is impossible to test treatments without sensitive measures, or biomarkers. A key topic at the Congress will be reports of new sensitive measures of cognition and brain changes, and strategies for how to use these measures in clinical drug trials."

The World Congress will include both international and Australian leading researchers including Associate Professor Georgiou-Karistianis' key note address on *Preparedness of neuroimaging biomarkers for clinical trials in Huntington Disease* and Professor Stout's presentation on *Selection of cognitive outcome measures for clinical trials in Huntington Disease*.

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Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Melbourne Convention + Visitors Bureau (MCVB) which bid for and won the event for the state, Mr Keith Herdman, said it was fitting that a medical congress of this caliber was being held in Melbourne.

“A world leader in medical research and bio technology, the state of Victoria is the birth place of some of the modern world’s most important medical advancements and is home to 139 biotech companies, 13 major medical research institutes, seven teaching hospitals and nine universities,” said Mr Herdman.

“The state can lay claim to having developed breakthrough products such as the Relenza anti-flu vaccine, the Gardasil cervical cancer vaccine, the cochlear implant, which has provided hearing for thousands of people throughout the world, and the atomic absorption spectrometer.

“Let’s hope that the state can add a cure for HD to this list.”

The World Congress on Huntington’s Disease will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre between 11 - 14 September 2011. For more information visit <http://www.worldcongress-hd2011.org>

**For more information on the World Congress of Huntington’s Disease or to arrange an interview contact Ali Webb, Monash Media & Communications, 03 9903 4841 / 0439 013 951 / [ali.webb@monash.edu](mailto:ali.webb@monash.edu)**

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