

ARCHBISHOP FISHER ANNOUNCES WINNER OF  
\$100,000 ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH GRANT

Archbishop Anthony Fisher today announced that the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney's seventh \$100,000 grant to support adult stem cell research has been awarded to Associate Professor Nick Di Girolamo of the University of New South Wales. Prof Di Girolamo is one of Australia's outstanding young scientists and is working on a project to improve the success of a stem cell delivery system which restores eye health and sight in patients with debilitating corneal disease.

"The independent panel of scientific experts who assessed the applications noted that this project was likely to yield therapeutic applications in the near future," explained Archbishop Fisher.

"If Prof Di Girolamo's research is successful, it will make a valuable contribution to medical science and offer hope and healing to patients whose eye disease are amongst the most debilitating and most challenging to treat."

"I am honoured to be the recipient of such a prestigious grant," said Prof Di Girolamo.

"Our research program is dedicated to healing sore eyes and restoring sight in patients with severe corneal disease that results in blindness."

Prof Di Girolamo explains his project aims to improve outcomes for patients undergoing sight-saving stem cell therapy. Using a marker he has recently discovered, stem cells from normal eyes will be identified and isolated in order to be transplanted into diseased eyes.

Prof Di Girolamo joins a distinguished group of Australian scientists who have previously been awarded this grant from the Archdiocese of Sydney "to pursue ethical, innovative and life-affirming research for the benefit of the human family", Archbishop Fisher said.

Past winners of the Archdiocese of Sydney grant have explored the potential of adult stem cells to assist in the treatment of Parkinson's disease (2003); the regeneration of skin after severe burns

(2005); the treatment of stroke victims (2007); the regeneration of normal blood functioning for cancer sufferers (2009); improving the success of tissue transplantation (2011); and the treatment of leukaemia and other blood cell disease (2013).

Archbishop Fisher said it was important the Catholic Church shows its support for ethical medical research which is respectful of human life and which offers real hope to those who are suffering.

“We are proud to support those who dedicate their lives to enhancing and saving the lives of others. We believe that Prof Di Girolamo’s project will help to save the sight of a significant group of patients who would otherwise descend into a world of darkness as their disease progressed.”