

## **News from Scleroderma Australia**

The year 2009 has commenced as a very good year for Scleroderma Australia.

### **The Scleroderma Research Grants**

In 2008, each state member of Scleroderma Australia had decided to pledge an amount to be used for research into scleroderma. With the assistance of Arthritis Australia applications for research projects be called for in mid 2008. All applications were reviewed by the Grants Committee of Arthritis Australia and the successful applicants were announced in February 2009.

The recipients of the 2009 Research Grants are as follows:

#### **Scleroderma Australia Grant: \$45,000**

Dr Pravin Hissaria – Division of Human Immunology, IMVS/SA Pathology

*Identification of novel markers and molecular targets in pathological fibrosis in scleroderma skin lesions*

We know very little about how scleroderma develops. This study will look at why cells change their basic characteristics in this disease. This a completely new approach and, if proven, the aim is to explore the regulatory mechanisms of this phenomenon to reverse fibrosis

#### **Scleroderma Australia seed/pilot grant: \$15,000**

Dr David Prior – Department of Cardiology and Rheumatology, St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne

*Assessing early pulmonary hypertension in scleroderma*

High blood pressure in the lungs or pulmonary arterial hypertension occurs in 25% of patients with scleroderma, causing breathlessness, and eventually heart failure and death. Treatment which can improve symptoms and life expectancy is usually started late because current tests for the disease only detect an abnormality after there is significant irreversible damage to lung blood vessels. This study will examine whether a new ultrasound can detect early abnormalities of lung blood flow in patients with scleroderma

These projects are significant milestone for Scleroderma Australia and it is intended that these will be the first of other research projects to be funded by Scleroderma Australia.

As well as the above, we are pleased to learn that Arthritis Australia has awarded another scleroderma study from the general research funds. This study entitled 'Measurement and applicability of scleroderma finger clawing; determinants of dorsal finger ulceration'.

## **March was Scleroderma Awareness Month**

This research grants announcement was quickly followed by the start of the National Scleroderma Awareness Month in March. The aims of this Awareness Month are threefold:

- To spread awareness of Scleroderma
- To provide opportunities education about Scleroderma
- To raise funds for Scleroderma Australia

This year has been successful on all counts. Information seminars have been most successful from the point of view of the numbers attending and the breadth of information disseminated. There have been funds raised by the states through a range of activities. There has been more media coverage than in other years with articles appearing in papers from Darwin in the Northern Territory, in Western Australia and in several community papers in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.

All this has been made possible by the work of many members and came to fruition because of the willingness of many to speak to journalists, be photographed and to tell about their lives and what Scleroderma has meant to them. We know this was not easy but their contribution was the reason there are now some many more in our communities now know a little about scleroderma.

We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the communications company, Hill and Knowlton for their assistance and advice.

## **New Brochures**

We continually receive very good comments about the brochures which have been produced and distributed by Scleroderma Australia. The next brochure in preparation is to be a dental brochure and also there is a brochure to assist in healthy eating.

We look forward to continuing to grow throughout the year.

Scleroderma Australia