

MEDIA RELEASE

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University of Tasmania and Parkinson's Research Foundation bridge gap in Parkinson's knowledge with first of its kind resource

Free online course featuring world leaders to help people with Parkinson's live their best possible life

The significant knowledge gap about the world's fastest growing neurodegenerative disease is about to be closed with the University of Tasmania today launching a first of its kind Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to support millions of people living with Parkinson's globally.

The Parkinson's MOOC - developed by the University's Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre and Menzies Institute for Medical Research - consolidates the latest information about the disease from leaders around the world.

Information on symptoms, risk factors, medicines, allied health therapies and strategies for living with Parkinson's is included in the free course that can be undertaken by anyone. The course also features accounts from people affected by Parkinson's disease and emphasises the importance of evidence-based information, in an accessible form.

Co-lead of the project and Wicking's Professor of Neurology Jane Alty said Parkinson's had doubled in prevalence in the past 20 years and it was important that people with Parkinson's, their carers, family, friends and health care practitioners were able to get reliable and holistic information.

"While there is a lot of information around about Parkinson's, it's not available in a clearly structured way, nor in a format that has proven to improve knowledge and understanding in an engaging and easy to digest way," Professor Alty said.

"Drawing on the proven expertise that the University of Tasmania has built in developing MOOCs - with its courses consistently rating in the top 10 of MOOCs worldwide - this resource will improve understanding and awareness of this important condition, nationally as well as globally."

Menzies' Professor of Physiotherapy and project co-lead Michele Callisaya - who drew on her professional expertise and her own experience as a person living with Parkinson's to build the MOOC - said in addition to delivering important information through five modules it also tackled common misunderstandings about the disease.

"For example, most think that the symptoms just involve changes in movement, while the reality is that changes in the brain can start many years before movement abnormalities emerge, and that early symptoms can include fatigue, loss of sense of smell, problems with sleep and anxiety," Professor Callisaya said.

The \$250,000 funding for the development of the MOOC came from the Parkinson's Research Foundation (PRF) and its venture philanthropy partner, Miriax.

The founders of the two organisations, Mr Michael Katz and Dr Richard Balanson - both who have been personally impacted by Parkinson's - also assisted with project management to enable the MOOC to be delivered within six months.

Mr Katz said the Parkinson's MOOC was a perfect project to begin the PRF's journey to beat Parkinson's, as it would improve knowledge about Parkinson's in an engaging way, and bring together a global community invested in advancing new approaches to risk reduction and treatment.

"From my own experience of being impacted by Parkinson's, the MOOC is a much-needed resource for those living with Parkinson's and all those people around them and having seen the information in development I am convinced it will help change the lives of many," Mr Katz said.

Dr Balanson said that in addition to bridging the gap, with the current dearth of available information that is reliable and holistic, the MOOC provided a powerful platform for researchers to recruit for future clinical trials and opened opportunities for future funding for the PRF.

“The focus of the Parkinson’s Research Foundation is to stop, repair and cure Parkinson’s and this MOOC can later be used to distribute targeted information about therapies and other treatments for Parkinson’s as they emerge.”

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Notes to Editor: For additional information about Parkinson’s including key data points, the MOOC and grabs from participants and support organisations about the importance of the MOOC please see electronic media kit, including fact sheets and audio and video news grabs [here](#)

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About The Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre: The Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre is at the forefront of translational research and support for issues confronting people with dementia and their carers. Projects are being carried out in Tasmania and nationally, across research fields such as neuroscience, medicine, nursing, psychology and sociology, health, economics and policy.



About Menzies: The Menzies Institute for Medical Research is one of Australia’s leading health and medical research institutes. Taking a disease prevention approach, our research is aimed at improving patient care and clinical outcomes for the community by translating knowledge into clinical and policy actions.



About Parkinsons Research Foundation (PRF): PRF is a registered charity, set up by Michael Katz and Richard Balanson, to promote research into the prevention, cure and control of Parkinson's Disease. PRF provides ongoing financial support to a small number of promising projects with which PRF has a close working relationship. PRF takes a hands-on approach to the management of its research projects. PRF representatives will take an active role in each research project’s regular cycle of project reviews to enhance project dynamics and to achieve faster, better results.