

MEDIA COVERAGE

Publication: Heidelberg Leader

Circulation:

Date: 25 January 2005

Page: 4



HEIDELBERG LEADER January 25, 2005 4

Cancer research earns honour



By Alana Rosenbaum

A GROUND-BREAKING cancer vaccine has earned Austin researcher Professor Vasso Apostolopoulos a top Australia Day honour.

Prof Apostolopoulos, head of the Austin Research Institute's Immunology and Vaccine Laboratory, was one of 120 Australians to be named an Australia Day Ambassador for her pioneering cancer research.

Since the early 1990s, the institute has been working on a cancer vaccine that stimulates the immune system allowing the body to call on its own resources to fight cancer cells. The institute also has documented leading research in the field of infectious diseases, designing vaccines for SARS, anthrax and malaria.

Prof Apostolopoulos, 34, said she never expected to make such a large contribution when she began her PhD in cancer research at the University of Melbourne.

"I thought I would add my piece to the puzzle. Now I've added more than a few pieces to the puzzle," Prof Apostolopoulos said.

The breast cancer vaccine Prof Apostolopoulos helped to design stimulates the immune system through a sugar-like substance known as mannan.

Prof Apostolopoulos said the vaccine was undergoing clinical trials and the same technique was being used to fight other cancers including ovarian, prostate and kidney.

"We have determined the 3D structure of how the immune system sees the cancer cell using a technique called crystallography," she said.

"We are now in a position to design better vaccines and to develop new cancer drugs."

A world leader in cancer research, Prof Apostolopoulos' work has been documented in more than 100 published research papers and books. She also has eight patents held on her discoveries.

She said it was important for scientists to feature in the line-up of Australia Day Ambassadors that included authors and television and sporting personalities.

"Scientists usually don't have a high profile with the general public."

To make a donation towards cancer research, phone Melinda Button on 9287 0621 or email m.button@ari.unimelb.edu.au.

Australia Day Ambassador Vasso Apostolopoulos.

Picture: DETLEV RUEFF, N31HB101