

## Media Release

### **“Angel Week” 26 November to 30 November 2007 Paving the way to the development of targeted new therapies for Rett Syndrome & ultimately a cure.**

With one major breakthrough under their belt, Australian Scientists studying Rett Syndrome, a serious genetic brain disorder, are now searching for a treatment to slow or halt the progression of this tragic disorder.

Rett Syndrome is the second most common form of severe mental retardation in females, affecting one in 8,000 births by the age of 15. It is a devastating condition characterised by progressive loss of speech and movement and the development of mental retardation at a very young age and as the child grows up.

Recent exciting research from the UK has demonstrated for the first time that abnormalities of brain function seen in Rett Syndrome may not be permanent, but may be potentially reversible.

Adrian Bird's research in Edinburgh created a Rett mouse in which *MECP2* function (the main gene responsible for Rett Syndrome) was knocked out, but could be re-activated after the mice had already developed the severe neurological abnormalities associated with Rett Syndrome.

Their startling finding was that not only could the disease progression of Rett Syndrome be slowed, but reversed so that the affected mice became normal by all measures.

Head of the Australian Research Team, Professor John Christodoulou says “this latest breakthrough opens up the exciting possibility that if it could be possible to increase the activity of the *MECP2* gene or identify its important target genes and reactivate them, it may now be possible to develop specific therapies for Rett Syndrome in humans”.

In anticipation of finding a treatment, our Australian Team has formed collaborative research links with other groups in Australia and around the world with a view to being able to undertake clinical drug trials here in Australia within the next 12 months.

Our long term dream is that some day we may be able to have newborn screening for Rett Syndrome, and then be able to start preventative treatments even before the girls show any signs of the disease.

**This vital medical research costs a lot of money and the Rett Syndrome Australian Research Fund (run by a group of volunteers who have daughters with Rett Syndrome) is having angel week from 26 November to 30 November 2007. Angels will be sold from 1 November to 31 December. Angel ornaments \$10, keyrings \$10, pins \$5 and pens \$5 will be sold at Ed Harry Menswear Stores and Mr Minit Stores across Australia in an effort to keep the momentum for this groundbreaking research moving at a pace. As the charity is voluntarily run, all profits are spent directly on this research. You can also purchase online at [www.rett.nesher.com.au](http://www.rett.nesher.com.au) Mr Minit will engrave a name free up to 10 letters on all angels.**

**Patrons of the charity are: Susie Maroney Ultra Marathon Swimmer & Brett Aitken Olympic Gold Medallist 2000 (has a daughter Ashli with Rett Syndrome).**

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For more information: please call Rett Syndrome Australian Research Fund on 1800 177 111 or email [jilllis@ispdr.net.au](mailto:jilllis@ispdr.net.au)