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TITLE: 7 researchers selected for NRF Investigatorship award, fellowship

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The seven candidates - Dr Tam Wai Leong, Dr Yvonne Tay, Dr Koh Tong-vey, Dr Daniel Messerschmidt, Dr Gao Weibo, Dr Kim Young-jin, Dr Tan Chee Wei - will be awarded up to S\$3 million over five years.

SINGAPORE: An inaugural Investigatorship award was introduced on Monday (Nov 3) by the National Research Foundation (NRF) to provide opportunities for established scientists and researchers to pursue groundbreaking research.

Designed to support a small number of Principal Investigators who have a track record of research achievements, each investigator will be awarded up to S\$3 million over five years.

For the inaugural awards, seven candidates were selected - Dr Paul Anthony MacAry, Dr Kanaga Sabapathy, Dr Markus Wenk, Dr Christos Panagopoulos, Dr Xiong Qihua, **Dr Loh Kianping** and Dr Liu Bin.

Said Professor Sabapathy, head of the Division of Cellular and Molecular Research at the National Cancer Centre Singapore: "It actually relieves a little bit of pressure from applying for grants, which are usually in three-year cycles. So we have a longer period of time to do research in an uninterrupted manner."

A research team at the National Cancer Centre is trying to understand why the p73 protein causes not just the death of cancer cells, but also their growth. With this knowledge, it hopes to disable the cell growth function of the protein and develop a treatment for cancer.

This research has just been given a boost with a S\$2.5 million grant over five years, under NRF's Investigatorship award. "By the end of five years, we would have an answer to the questions of how p73 enters cell death or cell growth," said Prof Sabapathy.

NRF said in a news release that "the award is based on their strong research track records and potential for achieving scientific breakthroughs".

NRF also awarded seven out of 192 applicants the NRF Fellowship, which targets junior faculty - Dr Tam Wai Leong, Dr Yvonne Tay, Dr Koh Tong-vey, Dr Daniel Messerschmidt, Dr Gao Weibo, Dr Kim Young-jin, Dr Tan Chee Wei.

Of the seven, four of the candidates are Singaporeans previously based overseas. At least two candidates have also been selected so far for the Returning Singaporeans Scientists Scheme, which focuses on overseas-based Singaporean scientists. This comes as NRF hopes to build up a core of research talent across different career stages.

Speaking at a media briefing on the progress made in Singapore's research, innovation and enterprise development, NRF's CEO, Professor Low Teck Seng, said talent in the Science

and Technology field continues to be a limiting factor.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR NATIONAL CHALLENGES

NRF has also given support to promising areas of research. For instance, it gave a S\$50 million grant to the Centre for Advanced 2D Materials' research on two-dimensional material. It also invested S\$42 million - through its Medium-Sized Centre grant - in the Singapore Centre for 3D Printing at the Nanyang Technological University.

Next year, NRF is expected to announce its plans in research, innovation and enterprise. Key research strategies seen over the past 25 years could be tweaked to focus more on national challenges, such as an ageing population. New areas of research can also be expected in the sustainability of cities through urban solutions, as well as new therapies for the Asian female population.

NRF said these areas of research are based on Singapore's needs as well as recognising opportunities to export technologies overseas.

Prof Low said: "If we intend to deliver the best healthcare outcomes, the best medical service in an environment where the population is ageing, we will find ourselves in a situation where the healthcare costs may balloon.

"It is very important then for us to look at different strategies we can put in place to ensure that this continues to be manageable. This may be dependent upon a very clever use of technology in ensuring people are able to age in place. We need to look at strategies to ensure people stay healthy for longer periods of time and are economically viable for longer periods of time."

- CNA/xk/xy