

# What's News



breast cancer  
research centre-wa  
Incorporating Perth Breast Cancer Institute

WELCOME TO THE 2022 WINTER EDITION



**Prof. Arlene Chan AM**  
Medical Oncologist MBBS, FRACP,  
MMed (Palliative Care)

This winter has kept us busy here at Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA – many clinical trials are open, and though many COVID restrictions have been lifted in WA – the need to protect vulnerable patients has meant the continuation of masks, RAT or PCR testing prior to hospital admission and visits and ongoing diligence by all of us who work in health care.

We have another staff introduction in this edition of What's News from one of our newest oncologists, Dr Peter Lau. Dr Peter Lau is a medical oncologist and the Investigator-Initiated Research lead at BCRC-WA. He currently leads the breast cancer unit at Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital Medical Oncology Department and is actively involved with several breast cancer and immunotherapy trials. Learn more about Dr Peter Lau on [page 2](#).

Also, in this edition, we are able to share Monika Page's story about her continuing journey with breast cancer. Monika's journey began in 2020 when she was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer. Like many other women with breast cancer, she is a wife, mother, daughter and friend – and she continues to be. You can read her honest words about her struggle but also her hope on [pages 4-5](#).

Speaking of hope, our medical article talks about advancements in targeted therapies for HER2 positive breast cancer. Research is being done into new ways of targeting cancer cells to improve outcomes for those with breast cancer. Read more on [pages 6-7](#).

We have been keeping a steady eye on COVID-19, which has had various impacts on business, but we are happy to announce that we have begun to welcome back our volunteers at our front desk. The timing has been impeccable as we celebrated National Volunteers Week from 16-22 May 2022. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support, and we are glad to have them with us again.

Fundraising efforts have persisted in the face of COVID, and I would like to thank Bruce Seligmann and the Lovely Smocking Ladies, Christine Carmichael and the Mount Lawley Football team for fundraising on behalf of BCRC- WA. Your support has been integral to supporting our breast cancer patients and continuing our research.

Monika and family – [page 4](#)

## WELCOME TO

# Dr Peter Lau

**MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST/  
INVESTIGATOR INITIATED  
RESEARCH LEAD**



I'm really excited to be a new member of Breast Cancer Research Centre - WA (BCRC-WA) as both a medical oncologist and the investigator-initiated research lead. Having grown up in Perth, I completed my honours degree in immunology and then headed off for my medical training at the University of Queensland in Brisbane in 2004. I stayed in Brisbane for seven years before returning back to Perth when I was accepted for medical oncology specialist training at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Royal Perth Hospital. During this time, I gained my interest in breast cancer, leading to a fellowship in 2014 that evaluated the commonly used chemotherapy drug capecitabine in this disease.

After obtaining my medical oncology specialisation, I went to Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. I completed a PhD which included research into combinations of cell cycle inhibitors such as palbociclib with immunotherapy. With the COVID-19 pandemic, I subsequently headed back home to Perth in 2020 and accepted a position at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in the breast cancer service.

Earlier this year, I was honoured to become a member of BCRC-WA to help lead research activities with Professor Arlene Chan. It's a wonderful environment for our patients with dedicated cancer nurses, psychologists, researchers, in addition to the excellent surgeons, radiation and medical oncologists whom I work alongside. Having worked at a prominent cancer centre previously, I'm proud of the care we provide our patients and the terrific research here at Breast Cancer Research Centre - WA.

Outside of work, I'm supported wonderfully by my wife Melanie and kept busy by my three young daughters who bring endless laughter and joy and are growing up at a rapid and sometimes alarming rate! I also spend a fair bit of time on my bicycle and ride around 100 km a week in Perth, so there is a reasonable chance of seeing me on the road.

I'm thrilled to be a new member of the BCRC-WA family and look forward to being of assistance.

Dr Peter Lau

## FROM

# Fiona



For those who don't know me, I am the Business Manager at BCRC-WA and I am currently acting as the interim CEO. I have been with BCRC-WA for the past 12 months, assisting in the development and growth of the Perth Breast Cancer Institute here at Hollywood Consulting Centre and, more generally, helping everyone at BCRC-WA achieve our vision of being a comprehensive breast cancer centre of excellence.

After a long COVID hiatus, we have finally welcomed some of our volunteers back into the office. We are so happy to have them back with us; their presence has been a breath of fresh air and, as most of them are patients or former patients of the

centre, they are a wonderful reminder of why we do what we do. We hope our other programs, especially PYNKS and Chemowise, will start up again soon. When they do, we will make sure to let everyone know.

Our Couture for a Cure event will be taking place on 29 October 2022 at the Pan Pacific Perth Hotel. We have proudly partnered with Channel 9 to bring you this black-tie event, and it is well on its way to becoming the event of the year. The VIP tables have all been sold, but other tables are still available for those who would like to attend. I look forward to seeing many of our readers at the event and participating in the evening's festivities.

Thank you to all of you for your support so far, whether it be in fundraising, volunteering or just a friendly face and a kind word. It certainly makes BCRC-WA a rewarding and enjoyable place to work.

**Fiona Cocks  
Interim CEO**

**breast cancer  
research centre-wa**

# COUTURE for a cure

Guests are invited to enjoy an evening of style and glamour, **Saturday 29th October 2022** at Pan Pacific Perth, to support Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA.

Proudly partnered with Channel 9, COUTURE FOR A CURE will bring WA's best Designers to the runway for a very worthy cause.

Tickets are limited so to avoid disappointment, secure your table today!  
[givery.com.au/bcrcwa](http://givery.com.au/bcrcwa)

MONIKA'S

# Story

**My name is Monika Page. I'm a mother, a wife, a daughter, and I'm on a breast cancer journey.**

Not a sentence I thought I'd be saying in 2020. Or ever, in fact.

This photo was taken just before my diagnosis. It was my husband's 40th birthday, and we hosted a party at our house. I look at this photo often as, unbeknownst to me, lurking beneath my party dress was a tumour, and soon life would never be as carefree and happy as to how I felt in that photo.

Just after this party, we went to Singapore for a holiday before the busy but wonderful year that was supposed to be 2020 started. On one of the mornings we were about to go sightseeing, I was putting on sunscreen as I was wearing a singlet, and that's the first time I felt my lump and the thing that would turn my life upside down.

I thought nothing of it as I was healthy, exercised every day, didn't smoke, didn't drink; I was a real party animal. I also had no cancer in my family. I figured if the lump didn't go away in a month or two, I'd maybe get it checked out. Or knowing me, probably not. Not only was I too busy going about life, but those kinds of things happen to other people, right?

When the doctor told me I had triple-negative breast cancer, my first reaction was laughter. She'd obviously confused me with another patient. It took me a minute to comprehend her words. Very quickly, my laughter turned to hot, messy, ugly tears as I realised this was actually happening.

Soon after, I sat in Professor Chan's waiting room. The strangest thing happened. A lady came up to me, right up close to my face, and said, 'can I hug you?' She hugged me and said, 'you're going to be alright; you're in the best hands here.' And then she left the room, and I felt like an angel had hugged me. It was a surreal experience.

And she, whoever she was, was right. I genuinely believe that being in Dr Willsher's and Professor Chan's hands means that I get to be here today to watch my son grow up. They are my superheroes.

A couple of weeks later, I started 16 weeks of chemotherapy and watched myself become a shell of the person I used to be. I stopped looking in the mirror as the person staring at me shocked me. My hilarious breast nurse Cath put up with me emailing her the most random of questions (am I supposed to sweat my body weight in sweat each night? Why do my feet feel like they are on fire, when will my eyebrows grow back - the list went on!) and kept assuring me that I would get through the dreaded day 4 of each chemo cycle, despite me telling her I couldn't.

After chemo, I had a double mastectomy and lat dorsi flap surgery with the incredible Dr Tony Connell. It was such a seamless experience, given that Dr Connell works with Dr Willsher. Later, another six months of oral chemo.

By this point, I was mentally and physically done. I kept drawing on my mantra: this too shall pass. I also kept busy. I continued working full time, took up new hobbies like painting, and walked every day, even if some days I only made it to the letterbox.

It's been two and a half years since I started the journey. The fear of reoccurrence is very strong and occupies a lot of space in my head. I struggle to be rational, and every new bruise or cough terrifies me into thinking that it's back. When I drive past the Mount Hospital, where my breasts were removed, I get an overwhelming feeling of sadness. I visit Professor Chan every couple of months as I am in one of her clinical trials, and I feel anxious every time I drive into the hospital. I'm a work in progress in dealing with these thoughts.

Life holds no promises that everything will be ok. I'm about to have yet another breast surgery in August. But because of the amazing service that is available to us here in Perth, I get to continue to be a wife, a mother, a friend, and a daughter. And I get to be someone with a totally new perspective on life. And for those on this journey that are struggling right now, you can do this. You can.



*"For those on this journey that are struggling right now, you can do this."*

## HER2 POSITIVE BREAST CANCER

*Targeted therapies present and future*

About 15-20% of women diagnosed with breast cancer have the HER2 positive breast cancer subtype. The HER2 protein in these breast cancers is increased in amount and becomes the most important driving force responsible for cancer cell growth.

Trastuzumab is a lab-synthesized drug that attaches to the HER2 protein in breast cancer cells and stops cancer cells from growing and dividing. It was approved in 1998 to treat women with metastatic HER2 positive breast cancer. Then later approved for use in early breast cancer patients in 2005.

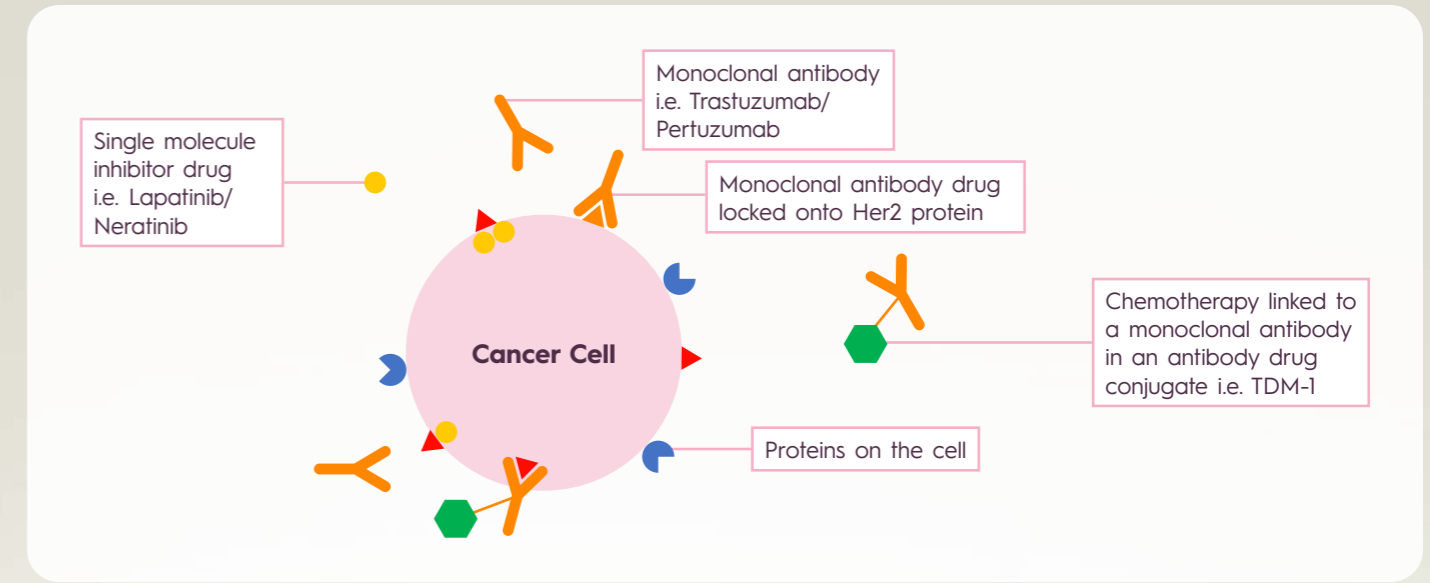
This type of HER2 targeted treatment has dramatically improved the life span and increased cure rates in women with metastatic and early breast cancer, respectively. As shown in Figure 1 below, newer HER2-targeted drugs have since been approved. This was after being rigorously tested in large clinical trials, proving that they could further improve patients' survival.

At present, both trastuzumab and pertuzumab are approved to be used as the first treatment with chemotherapy, specifically in women with metastatic HER2 positive breast cancers in Australia. When such women were followed-up by the original Cleopatra trial designed to test this treatment combination, 37% of these

women remain alive eight years after starting treatment. This is a remarkable achievement in the history of breast cancer treatment.

If metastatic breast cancers become resistant to these initial treatments (trastuzumab, pertuzumab and chemotherapy) and no longer work, patients are usually switched to T-DM1, otherwise known as "trastuzumab emtansine". As shown in Figure 2 below, T-DM1 is an antibody drug conjugate (ADC) with a small amount of chemotherapy attached to the monoclonal antibody that targets the HER2 protein.

Chemotherapy is released into the breast cancer cell when the drug is locked onto the HER2 protein. Because the small molecule of chemotherapy is only released within the HER2 positive breast cancer cell, this is called targeted treatment and is not referred to as "chemotherapy". When TDM-1 no longer works, the small molecule inhibitor drug lapatinib can then be used.



Recently, pertuzumab and T-DM1 have both been adopted into the treatment of early HER2 positive breast cancers. Before surgery, pertuzumab is added to trastuzumab and chemotherapy to shrink the size of the breast cancer (but this drug is not funded by Medicare and requires payment for at least part of the cycles of pertuzumab treatment).

It has been shown to improve the probability of shrinking the HER2 positive breast cancer completely without any cancer cells left in the breast. At the time of surgery, if any residual breast cancer cells are found in the breast or adjacent lymph nodes after initial trastuzumab +/- pertuzumab and chemotherapy, switching to T-DM1 treatment has been shown to improve cancer survival outcomes when compared to staying on trastuzumab for up to 12 months.

Adding 12 months of neratinib (again not currently PBS funded) after completion of 12 months of trastuzumab in some early breast cancers can also improve cancer-free survival in women with both HER2 positive and hormone positive subtypes.

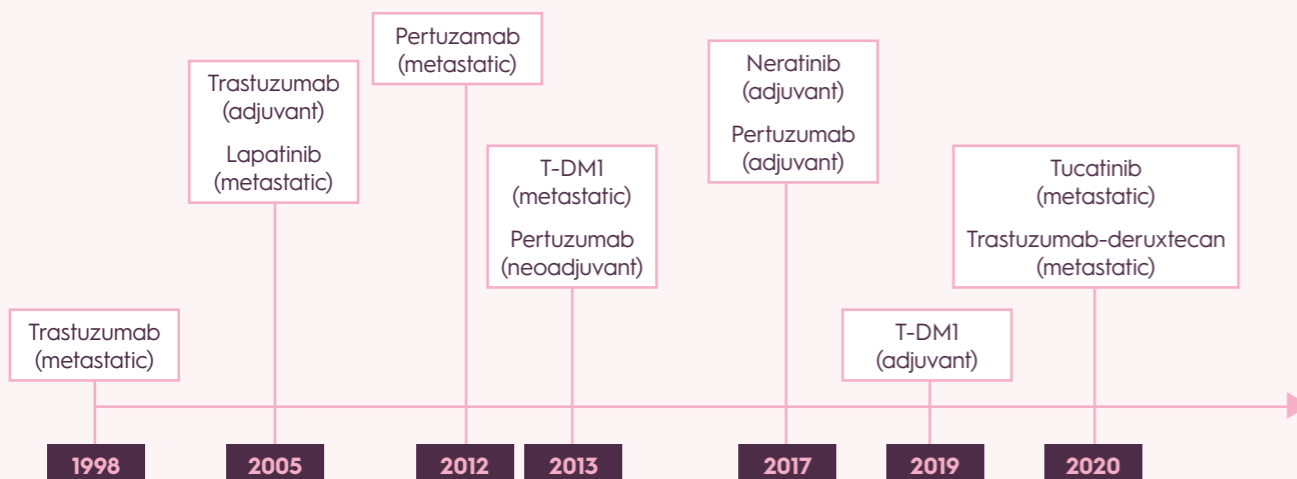
Newer ADC such as trastuzumab-deruxtecan (T-Dxd) has recently been approved by the American and European health agencies. This is a result of two trials that showed that T-Dxd can outperform the current standard treatment of T-DM1.

Another new drug called tucatinib has also been approved overseas. It also works to shrink cancers even after trastuzumab and T-DM1 have stopped working.

We are hopeful that these drugs may be funded by Medicare so that patients with HER2 positive metastatic breast cancer can access these effective treatments when and if they are needed.

In summary, research into new ways of targeting breast cancer cells to improve outcomes for women with breast cancer is a continuous process. We are dedicated to finding the best treatments for all of our patients.

### Her2 targeted therapies approved by both European Medicines Agency (EMA) and US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)



NATIONAL

# Volunteer Week

12-22 May 2022 was National Volunteer Week!

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers who have helped BCRC-WA. Their willingness to give their time and talents to us is greatly appreciated. We are very grateful for the significant help they provide to our staff and the positive difference they make to our patients' experiences.

Though we haven't been running our regular volunteer program due to COVID-19, we finally welcomed Joyce Hart back to our reception desk! We look forward to welcoming back even more of our volunteers as COVID case numbers start to fall.

If you are interested in becoming a BCRC-WA volunteer in the future, feel free to register your interest on our contact form on our website.

"Volunteering for BCRC-WA is my way of a thank you. The care provided by Prof Arlene Chan and her team of experts is unquestionably first class and at the forefront of research into breast cancer."

- Joyce Hart



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# with us!

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- Search for "BCRC-WA"

## FUNDRAISING

# News

### LOVELY SMOCKING LADIES

Raised \$12,200

In the Autumn 2022 edition of What's News, Bruce Seligmann wrote about his wife Pam's 19-year journey with cancer. Bruce writes again about Pam's smocking group and their efforts to raise funds for BCRC-WA.



In 2005 Pam began smocking for cancer, and in the next seven years, raising \$3,000. Then in 2012, with some friends, she formed a smocking group named the Lovely Smocking Ladies (LSLs) to raise funds for BCRC-WA by selling smocked dresses - the first donation on 24 August 2012 was a cheque for \$445. In the nine years since, Pam and the LSLs have raised more than \$32,000. Some \$10,000 has been raised since 25 May 2018, when three years ago the return of Pam's cancer was diagnosed.

However, Pam and the LSLs were not just about raising funds. As indicated in the following note written by Pam in mid-2013, the most important aspect for Pam and the LSLs was having fun and sharing friendships.

'Our little smocking group has now increased in number and enthusiasm. It all began 18 months ago when we got together with our combined interest in and love of smocking and using these skills to raise funds to contribute to such an important cause as breast cancer research. However, without a doubt, the most important aspect is the fun we have, socialising and sharing our ideas and friendship. It is not all hard work!! Each of us has some unique skills... Sue is our "grub rose" expert turning her hand to intricately embroidered embellishments to the smocking...Bon has been busy making beautiful nighties for her five granddaughters... quite a project! Jenni, Anne, Mary and Dianne all help with my smocking projects, and Ann has taught us how to make little sun hats to match the sundresses.'

By Pam and  
Bruce Seligmann



## MOUNT LAWLEY FOOTBALL CLUB

Raised \$1,300

On Saturday, 28 May 2022, the Mount Lawley Football Club welcomed all ladies associated with the club, including their amazing women's team players, the wives and girlfriends, mothers and sisters, and all other supporters, to enjoy a day at the football club.

The DPD Women's Team & Huxtaburger B-Grade League sported pink socks with the BCRC-WA logo for the occasion. Raffle tickets were sold throughout the day with the draw being made after the game, with 100% of the proceeds going towards BCRC-WA.



The Mount Lawley Football Club is a successful, social and family-friendly amateur football club in the Perth Football League. Centrally located close to the Perth CBD, they have teams suitable for all skill and experience levels.

A heartfelt thank you to all the members of the club and everyone who took part in the exciting day!

## CHRISTINE CARMICHAEL'S AFTERNOON TEA

Raised \$4,178

Christine Carmichael wanted to 'give back' after surviving Breast Cancer and decided to fundraise to support Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA with the hopes of raising between \$2,000-\$4,000. Her 'Diamond Ring Raffle' was a huge success raising a grand total of \$4,178.



Sponsored by Cash Converters this amazing raffle was drawn Monday 14th March 2022 at the Gosnells Bowling Club, where guests were treated to a delicious high tea, courtesy of an amazing army of friends and members of the club.

First Prize was a Solitaire White Gold Diamond Ring valued at \$4,655 generously donated by Cash Converters Gosnells

Second Prize was Lunch for Four at Parliament House, Western Australia, valued at \$400 donated by Chris Tallentire MLA, Member for Thornlie, who also attended on the day.

Third Prize (but not least) was a Bunnings Voucher valued at \$100 kindly donated by Trish Klisc.

It is thanks to the kindness and grand efforts of people like Christine who help us continue to support to patients and families living with breast cancer in WA.



Leave a Gift in your will



"My decision to leave a gift in my will to the Breast Cancer Research Centre-WA was a purposeful choice. My gift was in memory of my late wife, Janine who received the best treatment and care available from the BCRC-WA team. It gives me great satisfaction that my bequest will have a long-term impact."

- David Park

Your gift can achieve so many things

Your gift can assist our general programs allowing BCRC-WA to apply these funds to research or where it is needed the most.



Contact our Fundraising Coordinator Sarina Menzies on 08 6500 5515 or [sarina.menzies@bcrc-wa.com.au](mailto:sarina.menzies@bcrc-wa.com.au) and learn more about how you can make a difference.

If you or someone you know would like to Fundraise for BCRC-WA get in touch with our Fundraising Coordinator [sarina.menzies@bcrc-wa.com.au](mailto:sarina.menzies@bcrc-wa.com.au) or phone 6500 5515.



**DONATE**

*Today*

There are many ways you can donate to BCRC-WA



Online at [bcr-wa.com.au](http://bcr-wa.com.au)



By direct deposit (NAB BSB: 086-006 Acct No: 73798 6097)



Phone us on (08) 6500 5501



In person at BCRC-WA, Suite 407, Hollywood Consulting Centre  
91 Monash Avenue, Nedlands WA

**Gifts of \$2 or more are tax deductible.**

BCRC-WA is self-funded and does not receive any government funding.

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