

Media Release

Premmie Owen Comes Home for Christmas

10 December 2013

When Tara Counsel of Morley went into labour at just 27 weeks in May this year, she didn't know if her baby Owen would make it until Christmas. But after four months in King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH), Owen will celebrate his first Christmas at home.

Born 3 months too early, at just 965 grams, Owen is one of nearly 3000 babies born prematurely in Western Australia each year. "The name Owen mean's little fighter", said Owen's mum Tara. "He certainly fought hard to survive, but he wouldn't have won his battle without the excellent medical care he received".

The Women and Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) is working to discover what causes early labour and how it can be prevented, through the combination of research with clinical care at KEMH.

One of the key areas under investigation is the link between very early cases of preterm birth, and infection and inflammation. WIRF's Research Assistant Professor, Dr Demelza Ireland, is an immunology researcher investigating new ways of blocking infection-related inflammation within the uterus that may lead to preterm labour and delivery.

"Infections cause inflammation which triggers early labour", said Dr Ireland. "We know that the inflammation reaction in the placenta is caused by chemicals known as cytokines. We are now studying a new group of drugs that block cytokines, which we hope will help stop early labour".

Dr Ireland is collecting placentas from women who give birth early at KEMH and is testing the effects of the cytokine blocking drugs. Two of the drugs tested have been shown to prevent the effects of inflammation in the placenta, and these drugs are now being tested further to see if they will help prevent early labour.

"We are also investigating ways of identifying women who may be at an increased risk of early labour due to infection", said Dr Ireland. "If we can identify these women before labour begins, we will be able to treat them early and hopefully prevent infection-related preterm birth".

WIRF is the charity of King Edward and relies on grant funding and community support to conduct their vital research. "It is so important that the community continues to support the work of WIRF", said Tara. "In future, mothers at risk of preterm birth may not have to suffer like I did, so it is just so important that this research continues".

WIRF's preterm birth research will benefit from funds and awareness raised at the TriEvents SunSmart Women's Triathlon, being held on Sunday 16th March, 2014, at Hillarys. To enter a team into the Women's Triathlon for WIRF, visit www.wirf.com.au/triathlon. Participants, who raise at least \$50 for WIRF for their participation in this event, will receive a complimentary WIRF running shirt.

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women & infants
research foundation
Western Australia

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Owen Counsel at 27 weeks, born weighing just 965 grams in May 2013.



Owen Counsel at home ready for Christmas in Dec 2013.

