

## Five teams get \$4.5m grant for infectious diseases research

By **NISHA RAMCHANDANI**

FIVE research teams in Singapore and Australia have been awarded a total of \$4.5 million in grants to carry out research projects aimed at tackling infectious diseases.

The research collaborations will work to fight infectious diseases that have been identified as significant threats to public health – such as tuberculosis (TB), dengue fever and influenza – and will be funded by the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*Star) and the National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia (NHMRC) joint grant.

“The theme of infectious diseases is a topical and timely one. Our experience in the past decade with Sars, avian flu and H1N1 has taught us that in an increasingly connected world, understanding and managing emerging infectious diseases are a matter of highest priority for all countries,” stressed A\*Star chairman Lim Chuan Poh.

Dr Sarah Dunstan of the University of Melbourne and Associate Professor Teo Yik Ying of the National University of Singapore (NUS) will receive A\$379,279 (S\$492,218) and S\$477,580 to develop research which can be used to create vaccines and treatments, while Prof Jamie Rossjohn of Monash University and Dr Lucia Mori of A\*Star's Singapore Immunology Network will get A\$329,673 and S\$393,000 to establish new strategies to target TB.

TB is the second most fatal infectious disease worldwide after Aids/HIV and is present in virtually all countries. In Singapore, the number of new TB cases reported since 2007 has jumped by 22 per cent, hitting 1,533 in 2011.

Prof Ken Shortman of The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research and NUS' Dr Sylvie Alonso will receive A\$382,653 and S\$445,200 to create enhanced vaccines against virus diseases such as dengue, hand, foot and mouth disease and influenza.

Prof Cameron Simmons of the University of Melbourne and Dr Khor Chiea Chuen from A\*Star's Genome Institute of Singapore will be given A\$304,673 and S\$483,000 to collaborate on a project that will help identify patients at risk of severe dengue.

And Dr Aeron Hurt of Melbourne Health and Dr Sebastian Maurer-Stroh of A\*Star's Bioinformatics Institute will receive A\$374,673 and S\$406,620 to work on providing better treatment for drug-resistant influenza viruses.