

# New gene named after famous Scottish vet

June 17 2011

---

Researchers at the University of St Andrews have discovered and named a new potentially cancer-controlling gene after a famous Scottish scientist.

The new gene, called Willin after Edinburgh's William Dick, has been identified by a worldwide collaboration led by Dr Frank Gunn-Moore at St Andrews.

Dr Gunn-Moore and his colleagues believe that the new gene may help control the development of cancers by stopping the activity of other cancer causing genes.

Dr Gunn-Moore named the gene after William Dick, who founded the veterinary school in Edinburgh, after originally identifying it whilst a postdoctoral student at the Dick Vet.

The name Willin incorporates William with other genes in the same family that end with 'in' (for example another gene is called 'merlin').

The work came from a successful collaboration between the Schools of Biology and Medicine at St Andrews.

Dr Gunn-Moore (School of Biology, Biomedical Research Science Complex) commented, "During my time at the Dick Vet, between 1998 and 2000, I was studying how nerve cells are insulated when they fire electrical signals. It was whilst I was performing this work that I identified a new gene sequence.

“For many years we did not know what Willin did, but subsequently we have now found that this new gene may actually help control the development of cancers by stopping the activity of other cancer causing genes.”

Fellow researcher at the School of Medicine at St Andrews, Dr Paul Reynolds added, “After the sequencing of the human genome, it is now rare to identify a new gene product. This collaboration came about when I heard a ‘work in progress’ talk from the lead author, PhD student Lotte Angus.

“I realised that this gene might be a missing part of a newly identified chemical signalling pathway which is involved in how cells grow and develop”.

The work is now being continued by PhD student Susana Moleirinho from funding from SULSA (Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance).

Dr Gunn-Moore continued, “We have shown that if this gene is switched on then it has the ability to de-activate other [genes](#) which are involved in the formation of cancers. At present we cannot tell what type of cancer is affected, but our work will lead to a better understanding of Willin’s role.”

The finding is published by *Nature* online at:

[www.nature.com/onc/journal/vao ... /index.html#13062011](http://www.nature.com/onc/journal/vao.../index.html#13062011)

Provided by University of St Andrews

Citation: New gene named after famous Scottish vet (2011, June 17) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-gene-famous-scottish-vet.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.