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## Group honours life-saving cancer doctors

Updated: 11:12, Thursday November 14, 2013



It has taken 40 years, but a busy group of cancer scientists has taken time out to honour four colleagues who have saved thousands of lives.

The four pioneered a new way of researching blood cancers, says Delaine Smith, CEO of the Australasian Leukaemia and Lymphoma Group.

They are leukaemia specialists Professor Jim Bishop and Professor Ray Lowenthal, statistician Dr Jane Matthews and the late Professor Ian Cooper, who specialised in lymphoma.

They will be the first people to be inducted into the organisation's hall of fame, which will be launched at the group's 40th-anniversary dinner in Sydney on Thursday.

Members of the group started collaborating on research in the 1980s, long before it was fashionable.

'We all got together because we wanted to do clinical trials, but none of us had enough cases to do it as individuals,' said Prof Bishop, a former chief medical officer of Australia who heads the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre.

'It was groundbreaking to suggest that we put aside our individual views and come together to think collectively.'

It was not long before the group started collaborating internationally.

'There was interest in our work from the US, UK and Germany,' Prof Bishop said.

The prospects for an adult with leukaemia were dismal in the 1980s, said Prof Lowenthal, of the University of Tasmania.

'We set the group up to try to work out how to get the best for our patients,' he said.

'I am proud the group has developed to such an extent that virtually every hospital that treats leukaemia and lymphoma in New Zealand and Australia collaborates in testing new treatments and finding ways to improve treatments.'

Prof Bishop said he has particularly enjoyed the ability to work with patients and conduct research at the same time.

'The primary purpose is to help the patient,' he said. 'But you are also learning from each patient.'

The outlook for leukaemia patients is much better than it was, he said. But the improvements have come in small increments.

'It has happened only because of the co-operation of large numbers of patients and specialists around Australia and New Zealand and the world,' he said.

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