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Griffith researchers create Malaria Box to advance drug discovery for major topical diseases

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Griffith University tropical disease researchers have joined together with a host of international laboratories to advance drug discovery for major topical diseases through the creation and testing of the Malaria Box.

In a paper published this week in the top journal *PLoS Pathogens*, the global team present findings on a panel of 400 chemical compounds -- dubbed the "Malaria Box" -- with potential application as therapeutic starting points for diseases like malaria, trypanosomiasis and toxoplasmosis.

Typically researchers would have been working on their own compounds but this shared collaboration opens new doors for international advances in drug discovery.

The search for new therapies for tropical diseases is of high importance due to a lack of effective vaccines, lack of drugs for some diseases or reduced efficacy of some drugs due to resistance.

Tropical diseases are an enormous health problem, impacting hundreds of millions of lives and killing millions annually. In 2015 the World Health Organisation reported that there were more than 200 million clinical cases of malaria alone, which resulted in an estimated 438,000 deaths. This translates to almost one death due to malaria every minute.

"The work presented in this paper represents a significant step forward in our ability to combat major tropical infectious diseases," says Griffith University researcher Professor Vicky Avery, who was instrumental in selection of the 400 chemical compounds that make up the Malaria Box.

Professor Avery is one of five researcher leaders from the Griffith Eskitis Institute for Drug Discovery who contributed to the global open source drug discovery initiative.

The teams' expertise spans the disciplines of biology and chemistry.

Malaria drug discovery researcher Associate Professor Kathy Andrews, who worked together with chemist Professor Sally-Ann Poulsen and cancer biologist Associate Professor Kathryn Tonissen on the project says: "If we are going to make a difference and help save lives with new drugs we need to think differently."

"The data presented in this paper will be an extremely valuable source of information for drug discovery researchers around the world -- not only those working on tropical diseases but also to those working on other infectious diseases and even cancer." Leading drug discovery researcher and chemist Professor Ron Quinn says the work is a great example of how the Eskitis Institute for Drug Discovery is bridging the gap between chemistry and biology to discover new ways to treat infectious diseases.

"Eskitis researchers are at the cutting edge of drug discovery for infectious diseases and we are delighted to be able to contribute to this important global collaboration," he says.

Source:
Griffith University
