Prestigious Research Medal Awarded to Professor Kathryn North AM

On Tuesday, 16th October, Professor Kathryn North AM was presented with the prestigious Ramaciotti Medal for Excellence in Biomedical Research following her role in discovering what researchers have termed the ‘gene for speed’.

The medal recognised Professor North’s incredible contribution to biomedical research in the key areas of neuromuscular disorders, neurofibromatosis and the study of genes that influence athletic performance and also saw Professor North receive a $50,000 grant for future research.

Leading a team of more than 50 multi-disciplinary researchers, Professor North gained global recognition for the research that led to the discovery of skeletal muscle gene linked to muscle performance and function, ACTN3.

Professor North’s research revealed that despite one in five Australian’s being α-actinin-3 deficient, no Olympic sprinters have ever been found deficient in that gene.

The discovery of the new gene is hoped to provide new neuromuscular genetic information that will help child and adults better prevent, isolate or manage muscular diseases.

“Discovering the link between genetic variation and athletic performance opened a new path of study for both sports science and public health. Together with my research team, I’m now exploring how ACTN3 affects how individuals gain weight and respond to exercise and this is likely to emerge as an important risk factor for diabetes and obesity,” Professor North said.

Professor North, Douglas Burrows Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Sydney and Head of the Institute for Neuroscience and Muscle Research, dedicated a large part of her research to focus on understanding neuromuscular disorders in children, such as muscular dystrophy.

In addition to her research, Professor North also cares for over 900 children with neuromuscular disorders including muscular dystrophy, myopathy and neuropathies and over 1200 children with Neurofibromatosis Type 1.

The Ramaciotti Medal was presented at the annual Ramaciotti Awards in Brisbane, where Perpetual also allocated over $1.6 million in funding to Australian biomedical researchers on behalf of the Ramaciotti Foundations.