

## **Under the Microscope** with Professor David Ravine

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The study of a rare chromosomal abnormality found in a West Australian patient could unlock some of the mystery surrounding the causes of autism.

University of WA and RPH Medical Genetics Professor, David Ravine, has been awarded a \$12,500 grant from the RPH Medical Research Foundation, to enable his research team to study other people with autism.

Professor Ravine said the grant would allow his team to set up a new genetic testing strategy.

Inspiration for his research stems from a rare chromosomal abnormality found in a local patient with autism, offering a unique opportunity to discover an important gene necessary for normal human language development.

Professor Ravine and his cytogenetic colleagues at King Edward Memorial Hospital had discovered the abnormality, which was an important gene necessary for normal human language development.

His research will be carried out through the RPH Division of Laboratory Medicine and will extend the range of molecular genetic diagnostic testing that can be offered to other RPH patients.

Professor Ravine said autism was a brain disorder that became apparent in early childhood and persisted through adulthood.

The disorder affects three main areas of development – communication, social interaction and creative and imaginative play.

“At present there is no specific treatment for autism. The gene we are currently examining, if confirmed in other autism patients, offers the potential to create an effective drug treatment for autism,” Professor Ravine said.

He said the RPH research was possible because of access to a state-of-the-art Sequence Detection System, which had been donated by LotteryWest to UWA, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University and Murdoch University.

The study is being conducted in collaboration with Inner City Mental Health, the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the State Child Development Centre.

The Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) is also supporting the research.