Rotary District 9685 Vocational Excellence Awards 2022

Professor Vanessa Hayes

Professor Vanessa Hayes is the Petre Chair of Prostate Cancer Research and Head of Ancestry & Health Genomics Laboratory at the University of Sydney

Prof Hayes completed a PhD at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands in 1999, defining the genetic landscape of key regulator genes driving common human cancers.

In 2003, she was recruited to Australia and joined the Garvan Institute of Medical Research where she led a Cancer Genetics group focused on defining prostate cancer genetic risk factors in Australian men. This work awarded her the Cancer Institute of New South Wales Premier's Award for Cancer Research Fellow (2007), an Australian Young Tall Poppy Award for Science (2008), the Australian Academy of Science Inaugural Ruth Stephens Gani Medal for Human Genetics (2008) and a Fulbright Professional Scholarship to represent Australia at Penn State University (2009).

In 2008 she moved to the Children's Cancer Institute of Australia to establish one of the country's first next generation sequencing research laboratories. She used this technology to drive two large efforts. Firstly, she led the project to generate the first African human genomes, including that of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and secondly, she applied her skills to generate the genome and facial cancer genome of the Tasmanian devil.

In 2014, Prof Hayes returned full-time to Australia as the University of Sydney's Petre Chair of Prostate Cancer Research, where she is continuing her research efforts in human comparative and prostate cancer genomics. Prof Hayes has advocated for the inclusion of indigenous and under-represented communities in the benefits of genomic research. Her work in Southern Africa led her team in 2019 to rewrite human history, placing our anatomically modern human origins not in east Africa, but in Botswana.

Rotary District 9685 is honoured to recognise Prof Hayes with a 2022 District Vocational Excellence Award.