

News

Steroid-free asthma drug bid

By NYSSA SKILTON

AN ANU PhD student is stripping back steroids to uncover a new anti-asthma drug.

Jacki Kitching's research was last month recognised when she received a DuPont Australia and New Zealand 2007-08 Innovation Award in the tertiary student category.

The biennial awards, which attracted a record 98 entries from across Australia and New Zealand, recognised innovation and advances in industry, science, the environment and agriculture.

Ms Kitching said she hoped her research could one day lead to a drug that would help people suffering from severe forms of asthma without the need to use steroids.

Asthma is Australia's most widespread chronic health problem, affecting more than 2 million Australians.

Ms Kitching said the incidence of asthma within Australia was high by international standards and it was increasing.

Steroid-based drugs were used to target one of the mechanisms of asthma, but there were concerns about their long-term use.

Ms Kitching worked in the laboratory, "stripping back" the steroidal core to its basics,



PhD student Jacki Kitching

and then built a series of compounds which were no longer steroidal.

"If you're retaining the activity of the steroidal compound, but it's not a steroid, then this is a really good thing," Ms Kitching said.

"It's very early stages, so it's got a long way to go, but it's a good start."

The anti-asthma research is conducted in collaboration with the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne and drug company Cryptopharma.

Ms Kitching hopes to finish her PhD in the next couple of months.