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HEALTH

Medical workers change the way we see, hear and feel

Healthcare benefits from innovative applications, devices and services

CHERYL JONES

A Melbourne company has combined audiology and information and communication technology in a service selling do-it-yourself hearing aids online.

The iHearYou service — offered by Blamey Saunders hears — bypasses audiology clinics, saving clients thousands of dollars, the company's executive director, operations Peter Blamey says.

He says: "iHearYou reduces common barriers to getting hearing aids, such as cost and distance from service providers."

Blamey and his team have made the finals of the Health category of *The Australian* Innovation Challenge awards with iHearYou.

The awards, now in their fifth year, are run by *The Australian* in association with Shell, with the support of the federal Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. They have a total of $65,000 in prize money.

Blamey says users buy the iHearYou hearing aids from the company online and download the software. A programmer device that comes with the hearing aid communicates with the user's hearing aids and PC or personal electronic device via Bluetooth, enabling users to adjust their hearing aid settings via the web. He says the service incorporates e-health.

"Our expert team can review the user's hearing aid settings, make recommendations for finetuning, and even adjust the settings remotely," Blamey says.

He says the company has attracted thousands of customers since it launched the service in 2011.

Glenn Marshall, of Sydney Children's Hospital, and colleagues Michelle Haber and Murray Norris, of the nearby Children's Cancer Institute, have made the finals with a breakthrough delivering personalised treatment for a form of childhood leukaemia.

Across many years the team developed a way to identify children with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia — the most common form of childhood cancer — who were the likeliest to have a relapse after conventional therapy.

The breakthrough, which has had a worldwide impact, has led to individualised therapy, with the timing and intensity of treatment such as chemotherapy and bone marrow transplants tailored to each child.

"This epitomises bench-to-bedside translation research that turns science in our laboratories into ways to save children's lives," Haber says.

A team led by biomedical engineers, Robert McLaughlin and David Sampson, of the University of Western Australia, has advanced to the finals with a miniature device with the potential to make breast and brain cancer surgery safer and more effective.

The device, which is small enough to fit inside a needle, is based on optical coherence tomography, a medical imaging technology that uses low-power, infra-red waves to probe tissue.

McLaughlin says the probe can be inserted into tissue to guide breast cancer surgery and brain biopsies.

The technology is in various stages of animal and human tests.

"We have performed preliminary studies in key medical applications with the potential to radically change surgery," McLaughlin says.

Also in contention is a team of medical researchers and materials scientists including Christopher Turner, of the University of South Australia's Future Industries Institute.

The group has developed a drug-delivery system using nanoparticles to transport a therapeutic antibody to chronic wounds, which can take years to heal.

The team is commercialising a therapeutic antibody that improves wound healing, Turner says, but the agent is broken down quickly by compounds at elevated levels in chronic wounds. The team has developed technology to load silicon nanoparticles with the drug for ointments for chronic wounds.

"We are developing the system and hope to start clinical trials in the near future," Turner says.

Carolyn Mee, of cmee4 Productions, of Sydney, has made the finals with Sound Scouts, a mobile game to test children's hearing before or during their first year of school.

The system, developed in collaboration with the National Acoustic Laboratories, of Sydney, is aimed at detecting undiagnosed hearing problems that otherwise would affect a child's academic and social development, Mee says.

"Sound Scouts has the expertise built in, so any responsible adult can set up the game and supervise a child playing," she adds.

She says the system had good results from trials on hearing-impaired and normal hearing children.

"Sound Scouts also enables hearing screening in remote and rural communities where access to audiologists is limited, and it allows working parents the opportunity to screen their children when and where convenient, the major reason identified in a parent survey as to why parents don't have their children's hearing tested," she says.

The system is already available to the public.

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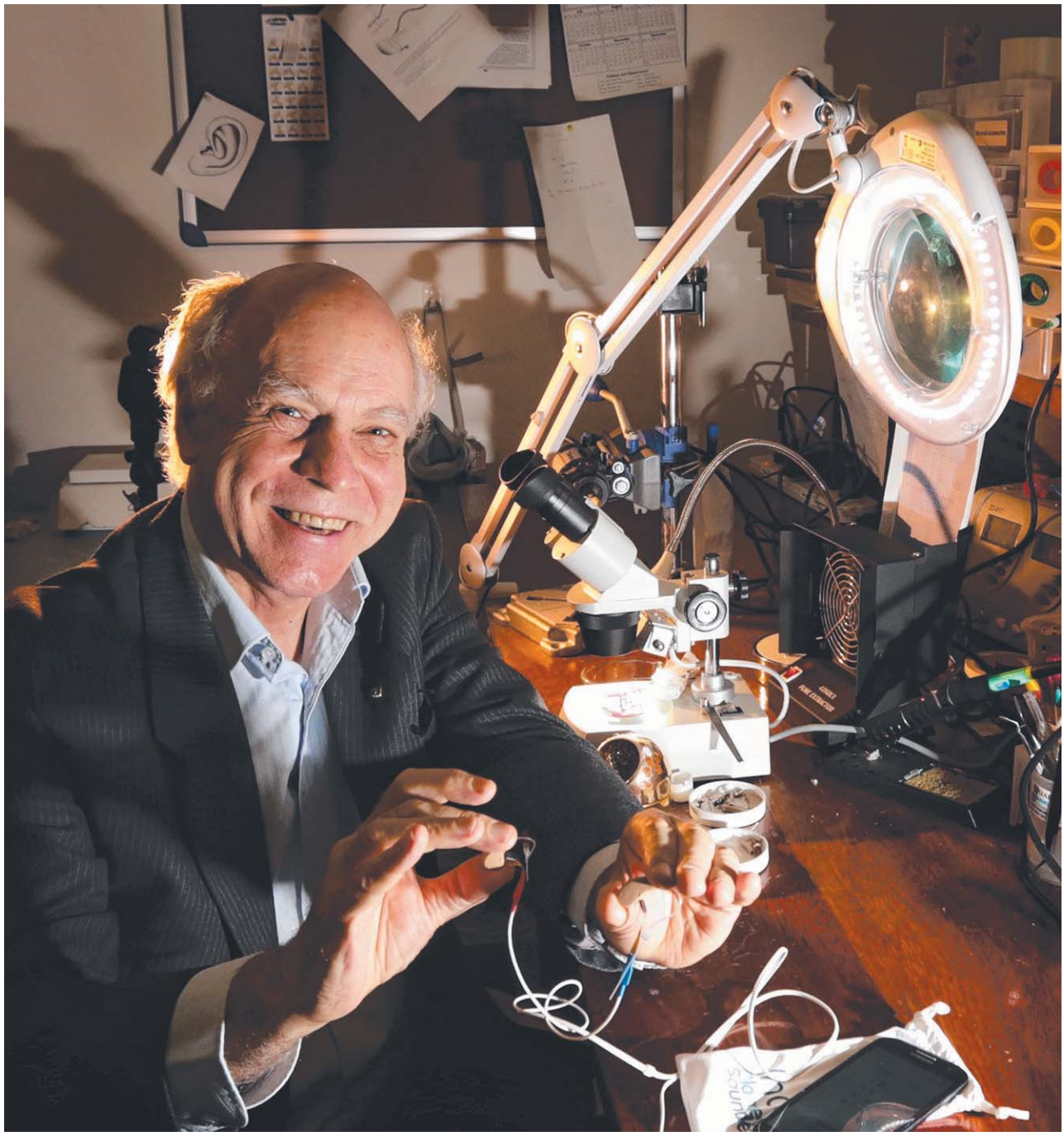

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Clockwise from main picture, Peter Blamey, Carolyn Mee, Christopher Turner, Glenn Marshall and Robert McLaughlin