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LEADERSHIP MATTERS

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THE IMPACT ISSUE

When leaders make
their mark



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The new CEO scoreboard



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MEET THE INNOVATOR

DHARMICA MISTRY

DHARMICA MISTRY WANTS TO REPLACE EXPENSIVE, UNCOMFORTABLE MAMMOGRAM SCREENING WITH A SIMPLE BLOOD TEST TO DETECT BREAST CANCER. IF SHE SUCCEEDS, IT COULD SPARK A DIAGNOSTIC REVOLUTION. BY SUSAN MULDOWNNEY

ABOUT 15,900 WOMEN and 150 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia this year. While mammograms are a key tool for early detection, the test is generally limited to women aged over 50 (breast tissue is less dense from that age, so the scans reveal more). Dr Dharmica Mistry has spent the past eight years researching and developing a new diagnostic tool for breast cancer that will be available to people of all ages, in all places. It's a simple blood test.

Mistry, who in March was named NSW Young Woman of the Year for 2016, began researching breast cancer after graduating from the University of Sydney in 2007 with a major in microbiology. Her first job was studying the association between the disease and human hair. Mistry discovered that women with breast cancer have higher levels of phospholipids (a type of fat) in their bloodstream and this can be detected in hair.

"I was testing with my own hair in negative control experiments and one day the feature that implies you've got breast cancer was popping up in my hair pattern. Up to this point, the association between the disease and hair was not understood," she explains. "I realised that every couple of months I put olive oil in my hair to condition it and olive oil is a lipid. It was a very revolutionary moment for us because the penny dropped and we said, 'OK, this is what it is'."

Mistry set up BCAL Diagnostics in 2010 with the sole aim of pursuing this research. If the high level of lipids were detectable in hair, she believed they would also be present in blood. The company wants to develop a reliable BCAL (Breast Cancer Associated Lipids) test that everyone can use.

The results are looking promising – the past 100 samples have shown an accuracy of 90 per

cent and the test is due to undergo large-scale clinical trials over the next year.

In its early stages, Mistry says, the blood test will be used in addition to mammograms for early breast cancer detection.

"It really needs to find its legs and show that it can do what it says it can do before it can be a standalone screening tool," she explains. "But the vision is that it will provide a screening test for women of all ages in all areas – remote, rural or in outreach programs. Mammograms are really expensive so it would change the paradigm."

Asking questions is an essential part of her job, she says. "You're always asking 'why' so you can find the next logical step toward a solution, and when you find that solution, you iterate. That's essentially how we approach everything."

Mistry views science as being a platform for change. "Cancer has touched people's lives everywhere. I see this as a chance to do some really impactful research."



“ YOU'RE ALWAYS ASKING 'WHY' SO YOU CAN FIND THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP TOWARD A SOLUTION. ”

– DHARMICA MISTRY

THUMBS UP



PAPPADAVADA:

Many food retailers and wholesalers donate unsold produce to charities but Minu Pauline's Pappadavada restaurant in Kochi in southern India goes a step further. It has an operating refrigerator on the footpath outside the business, which it stocks with 50 free meals for the poor each day. The public can also leave food, so long as it's neatly packaged and marked with a date.



HAMDI ULUKAYA:

The 2000 employees of US yoghurt maker Chobani are rejoicing in the news that company founder Hamdi Ulukaya will be granting them shares – 10 per cent of the company's worth [conservatively set at US\$3 billion] – when it's sold or publicly listed. Ulukaya said it's about giving the workers an ownership stake in the company. The average employee payout would be US\$150,000.



MARK ZUCKERBERG:

Facebook's hoodie-wearing CEO isn't content with his business out-earning its tech rivals (Facebook tripled its first quarter earnings to US\$1.5 billion); now he has found a canny way to restructure the company so he can give away shares without losing control of the business. These new class C "non-voting" shares will let Zuckerberg and his wife fulfil their ambition to give away billions to charity during their lifetime.

THUMBS DOWN



7-ELEVEN:

In May, Australia's 7-Eleven dispensed with its independent panel into wage underpayments, headed by Professor Allan Fels. The panel was convened after Fairfax and the ABC revealed franchisees were paying staff as little as \$10 an hour. 7-Eleven chair Michael Smith defended the decision by saying: "We can't outsource our morality."



DARREN HUSTON:

The CEO of online travel giant Priceline Group, which owns booking.com, resigned in April after it was revealed he'd had an intimate relationship with an employee, violating the company's code of conduct.



PORTICO AND PwC:

Temporary receptionist Nicola Thorp was sent home from PricewaterhouseCoopers' London office last December, losing a day's pay, because she was wearing flat shoes. Portico, the outsourcing firm that provides PwC's reception staff, had a dress policy that required women to wear shoes with two- to three-inch heels. An online petition to make the obligatory wearing of heels at work illegal has attracted more than 141,000 signatures. Portico has since dispensed with its "heels" policy.