Project editorial piece for public release

The highly aggressive nature of pancreatic cancer and the limited success of current therapies has recently been linked to the extensive surrounding stromal cells, which act to feed the tumour cells and protect them from chemotherapies. Our project focused on understanding the intricate biochemical cross-talk between pancreatic cancer cells and the surrounding stromal cells, with a special emphasis on identifying therapeutic targets that can be utilized to break this oncogenic process.

Our investigation has thus far revealed novel insights into the molecular pathways that contribute to the oncogenic cross-talk between pancreatic cancer cells and the surrounding stroma. Importantly, we now have strong preliminary data assessing a novel therapeutic target that can essentially de-sensitize pancreatic cancer cells from the proliferative signals secreted by the surrounding stroma.

We are now assessing this novel therapeutic approach using multiple cancer cell models, as well as physiologically relevant animal models to further establish the potential of this new therapeutic strategy.

Importantly, the data generated thus far has formed a strong foundation for more advanced studies and has led to the award of additional funding for my research team. It has also fostered collaborations with pancreatic cancer experts both in Australia and the USA, which will be vital to further develop this promising project.