

Kiss goodbye to multiple sclerosis

By **KATE HAGAN**
HEALTH REPORTER

THESE young scientists are well aware of the statistics: three-quarters of people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis are women, and the average age of diagnosis is 30.

MS has drastically altered the lives of some of their peers, and they are working in different ways to better understand the disease of the central nervous system that affects about 20,000 Australians.

Tears well in the eyes of PhD student Natalie Payne, 27, as she describes the reaction she gets from people when she tells them about her research: "It's amazing how many people tell you they know someone with MS. It's good to know you could be helping them."

Ms Payne is working with

neuro-immunologist Professor Claude Bernard at Monash University to develop stem cell-based therapies.

With MS, the body's immune cells attack the central nervous system, affecting the ability of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord to communicate with each other. Symptoms are varied and unpredictable but can include a loss of motor control, fatigue, vertigo, memory loss and cognitive difficulties.

As part of her PhD, Ms Payne has been inducing an MS-like disease in mice and then treating them with stem cells to suppress signs of disease.

Taking a different approach is PhD student Jennifer Sabo and Dr Junhua Xiao, who are working at Melbourne University to identify ways for the

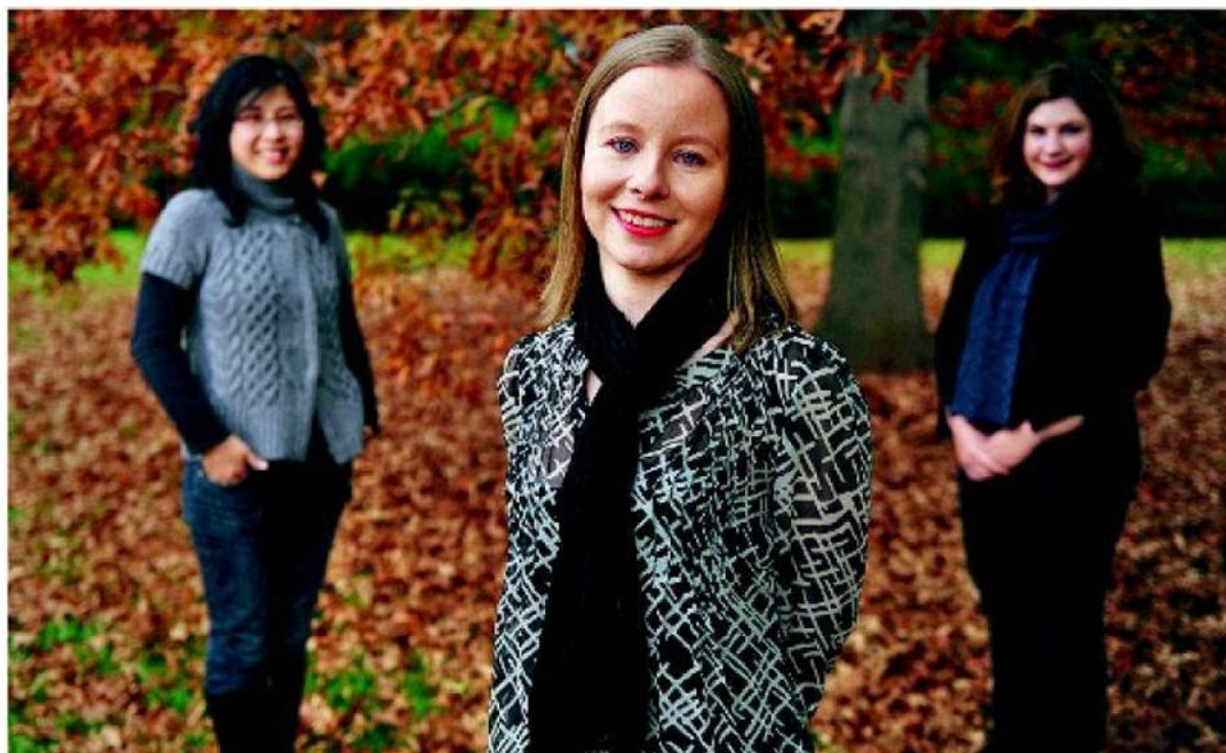
body to repair itself.

Ms Sabo is studying molecules in the brain that hinder the production of myelin and therefore the repair of damaged nerves. And Dr Xiao has found that a particular protein helps myelin production to repair the damaged nerves.

The trio are supporting a campaign to "Kiss goodbye to MS" that begins today, World MS Day. Women are urged to wear red lipstick and make a gold coin donation to help fund support services and research. Men are invited to join in by having someone plant a kiss on their collar.

LINK

► kissgoodbyetoms.org



Multiple sclerosis researchers (from left) Dr Junhua Xiao, Natalie Payne and Jennifer Sabo are familiar with the terrible statistics of the disease.

PICTURE: JOE ARMAD