

New stroke research could save lives and millions of dollars

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The Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) Stroke Research Group has developed a system to fast track stroke treatment which could benefit thousands of Australian stroke patients and save millions of dollars annually.

The system (called the Pre-hospital Acute Stroke Triage or PAST Protocol) reduces pre-hospital and emergency department delays to allow more stroke patients to receive brain saving thrombolysis or clot busting treatment within the three hour treatment window.

Results of the Australian-first trial conducted at John Hunter Hospital, New South Wales, are published in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia*.

"By reversing the crippling effects of stroke we are enabling more people to return to their families, their homes and their jobs. This also reduces the demand on nursing home beds, in-hospital rehabilitation programs and the health care dollar," said lead investigator Debbie Quain, a member of the HMRI Stroke Research Group and a Hunter New England Health Stroke Research Nurse.

As a result of the protocol, the number of patients treated with thrombolytic therapy at John Hunter Hospital rose from 4.7 per cent to 21.4 per cent. Of those treated, 43 per cent had minimal or no disability three months after the stroke.

Currently, less than 1 per cent of patients who have experienced an ischaemic stroke receive thrombolysis treatment in Australia. The world best practise rate is 15 to 20 per cent.

"If the PAST protocol is implemented nationally, an additional 2,500 patients could receive thrombolysis treatment each year and an estimated cost saving of \$31.2 million dollars per annum will be realised," said Associate Professor Chris Levi, Head of the HMRI Stroke Research Group and Director of Acute Stroke Services at John Hunter Hospital.

The protocol equips ambulance officers with a stroke assessment tool to more accurately identify patients who may benefit from clot busting treatment, gives the ambulance control officer phone contact with a stroke neurologist to identify 'out of area' patients who may be eligible for treatment, and allows an on-call acute stroke team to respond and provide immediate care for the patient on arrival at hospital.

Stroke affects 53,000 people in Australia each year.

Source: Research Australia

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