

Your face reveals sleep disorder risk

January 13 2009

(PhysOrg.com) -- A team of researchers from the University of Sydney has developed an innovative method to analyse digital photographs of faces in order to determine an individual's risk of developing Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA).

In conjunction with the Royal North Shore Hospital and the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, Professor Peter Cistulli and Dr Richard Lee have found that analysis of detailed measurements of the face from digital photographs can help doctors identify those most in danger of developing OSA.

"The novelty and potential clinical application of our work are very exciting and should hopefully lead to improved recognition and diagnosis of OSA in the community," Professor Cistulli said.

Four per cent of Australian middle-aged men and two per cent of middle-aged women suffer from OSA syndrome, while almost 50 per cent of middle-aged men snore during sleep: a symptom of OSA.

The disease is characterised by the repetitive closure of the upper airway during periods of interrupted sleep and is associated with high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and strokes. Previous methods of diagnosis have involved expensive specialist assessment and overnight monitoring in a sleep laboratory, meaning the majority of OSA sufferers are as yet undiagnosed.

"This new approach is really a response to the critical clinical need to

develop more readily accessible, non-invasive methods that can enable doctors to more efficiently diagnose larger numbers of patients," Professor Cistulli said.

Whilst being tested at the Royal North Shore Hospital the new test accurately diagnosed 76 per cent of OSA cases, yielding a higher success rate than the traditional clinical methods of questionnaires, medical histories and examinations.

Professor Cistulli's and Dr Lee's work has been recognised in two articles published in the latest edition of the international journal SLEEP and has been patented through Royal North Shore Hospital, who are hoping to commercialise the invention.

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Your face reveals sleep disorder risk (2009, January 13) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-01-reveals-disorder.html>

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