

U of A researchers hope to stop heart disease

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Researchers in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry are trying to reverse a devastating trend: cancer survivors developing cardiovascular disease, one of the top two killers in Canada.

Ian Paterson, an assistant professor of cardiology at the University of Alberta and Edie Pituskin, a registered nurse and PhD candidate in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, are starting what is called the MANTICORE clinical trials. [Women](#) with [breast cancer](#) will be put on heart medication before their cancer treatment.

"Our goal is to look at patients diagnosed with cancer and to detect heart disease and risk factors for heart disease sooner than they're being recognized and treat them aggressively," said Paterson. "We're hoping we can prevent heart disease not only during cancer treatment itself but after the cancer treatment is done."

All patients enrolled in this study must start on the [heart disease](#) medication with Paterson and Pituskin prior to treatment.

Paterson and Pituskin decided to start with breast cancer patients because it is the leading cancer in women and the leading cause of cancer deaths in women. Treatments have improved drastically over the years, in particular one pharmaceutical called Herceptin.

"The drug has been shown to really improve survival rates of some types of breast cancer," said Paterson. "Unfortunately it can also damage the heart in up to 20 per cent of women taking this drug."

"We're trying to detect signs of injury much more quickly using special blood tests and special imaging tests like an eco-cardiogram and MRI."

The pair will also try to detect if any of the women involved in the study have cardiac risk factors like high blood pressure and they'll try to treat those very aggressively.

MANTICORE looks to enrol 139 patients, so far 15 are involved in Edmonton and the study is now adding centres in Winnipeg and Toronto. The study is being funded by the Alberta [Cancer](#) Foundation and Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Cardio-oncology is an emerging field of medicine and Paterson and Pituskin are leading the way.

"We're one of the first and we could serve as a blue print for other programs," said Paterson, who also added they want to get a number of sites nationally on board with the trials. "Then we'll be able to track outcomes for these patients and develop a registry where we can track how people are doing and have these clinics make a difference."

Provided by University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry

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