

Advances in cholesterol-lowering drugs within five years

February 3 2014, by David Ellis

(Medical Xpress)—A leading cardiology expert at the University of Adelaide predicts that a new class of advanced cholesterol-reducing drugs could be ready for patient use within the next five years, helping to prevent heart attack and stroke.

Speaking in the lead up to Heart Research Day (14 February), Professor Stephen Nicholls says the University of Adelaide is leading a major, worldwide clinical study into the new class of drugs, which aim to reduce cholesterol and remove harmful plaque build-ups in the [blood vessels](#) and arteries.

Professor Nicholls is Professor of Cardiology at the University of Adelaide and Consultant Cardiologist at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and is the Heart Foundation Heart Health Theme Leader for the new South Australian Health & Medical Research Institute.

"Cholesterol is one of the key causes of plaque build-up in the blood vessels, or clogged arteries as they're often known, which can lead to [heart attack](#) or stroke. These are serious issues and although we've come so far in treating high cholesterol there's still much more that can be done," Professor Nicholls says.

He says controversy caused by the ABC television program Catalyst last year, which described [cholesterol medication](#) as "toxic", has scared many patients into stopping their medication.

"This controversy has had a massive impact on our ability as clinicians to treat the problem and prevent serious illness and death, so from my point of view it is a concern," he says.

"The fact of the matter is that statins, which are the class of drugs currently widely used around the world, are good at lowering cholesterol and they can help to treat serious health problems. But they don't do the job completely in the way we'd like them to, which is why further studies have been underway for some time to look at alternatives."

The latest clinical trial involves 200 hospitals in 20 countries around the world, including the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

"We're seeing evidence that these drugs will drive cholesterol levels right down, equivalent to where they were when we were newborn babies. This is a significant development, one that would revolutionise our approach to treating people with high [cholesterol](#), therefore helping to prevent [heart](#) disease and death," Professor Nicholls says.

He says these advanced drugs are at the later stages of clinical trials. "If approved, and we have every reason to believe they will be, we would expect the new drugs to be used by patients within the next five years. That's great news for the future health of our population," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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