

Battling the world's second biggest killer

December 8 2015, by Tony Malkovic, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

There's a good chance that you know someone who's either had a stroke or is going to have one: it's the second most common cause of death worldwide, causing one in every 10 deaths.

Just as alarming is the number of people left disabled from a stroke caused by either a burst blood vessel or clot in the brain, according to UWA stroke researcher Professor Graeme Hankey.

"In Western Australia 5,000 people have a new stroke each year, that's 13 a day, one every two hours," Professor Hankey said.

"There are another 41,000 people living in Western Australia who have survived a stroke."

Speaking at the recent Wesfarmers Harry Perkins Oration presented by the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research (HPIMR), Professor Hankey gave an overview of stroke and the challenges of coping with a looming epidemic.

The bad news is the number of strokes in Australia is rising due to population growth, an ageing population and lifestyle factors such as high blood pressure, lack of exercise, poor diet, diabetes, alcohol and smoking.

The good news is stroke can be prevented or treated, and WA researchers have a key role in research initiatives underway around the world.

Prof Hankey is an internationally renowned neurologist and co-principal investigator of a large study examining whether the antidepressant fluoxetine, commonly sold as Prozac, can help people regain limb strength after a stroke.

The study, called AFFINITY, involves 1600 [stroke survivors](#) in Australia and New Zealand.

It follows earlier French research that considered fluoxetine's effects on animals.

"As well as having an anti-depressant effect, it's also been shown—at least in animal models—to facilitate protection of the brain and

regeneration and repair," Prof Hankey said.

The AFFINITY study, conducted through the George Institute in Sydney, will pool its findings with similar studies underway in Sweden and the UK.

AFFINITY is still recruiting patients and is run by a team of seven based in Perth at the HPIMR.

"So when we run the trial, the whole operation is run out of the office in the Perkins," he said.

Prof Hankey and his colleagues are also involved in another study, the NAVIGATE ESUS trial involving 7,000 [stroke patients](#) in 25 countries.

The Canadian-led study is examining the effectiveness of the blood-thinning drug rivaroxaban, compared to aspirin, in preventing recurring stroke in patients with a recent embolic [stroke](#) of undetermined source (ESUS).

You can view Professor Hankey's oration [here](#).

More information: AFFINITY trial: www.georgeinstitute.org.au/pro...overy-affinity-trial

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