

Lung injury study could save lives in critically ill

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Researchers at Queen's University Belfast are investigating a potential new treatment for lung disease that could save many lives each year.

The research team is studying how statins, drugs which are commonly used to treat [high cholesterol](#), can be used to treat lung disease.

There is currently no effective treatment for [acute lung injury](#). The team hopes the work could boost [survival rates](#) for those who become critically ill and suffer lung failure after incidents such as road traffic accidents or severe infections.

Leading the research is Professor Danny McAuley from Queen's Centre for Infection and Immunity. He said: "When people are critically ill their lungs can fail. This is termed 'acute lung injury' and means that the lungs fill with water instead of air. Breathing becomes difficult and a ventilator is needed to take over.

"Statins have the potential to improve lung injury by reducing inflammation in the lung, reversing the damage and therefore decreasing the amount of water in the lungs. This helps fight infection."

The team includes Queen's researchers, Dr Celia O'Kane and Professor Cliff Taggart, along with Professor John Laffey from National University Ireland, Galway.

The research has the potential to free up healthcare resources and allow more people to return to the workplace sooner following spells in hospital.

Professor McAuley added: "There may be up to 45,000 cases of acute lung injury each year in the UK and Ireland and up to 22,000 deaths. Only around half of those who survive are able to return to work 12 months after discharge from hospital. After recovery from lung injury, patients can go on to experience a poorer quality of life and many are

unable to look after themselves.

"But this treatment has the potential to reduce the impact of acute lung injury and the time patients need to stay in intensive care units. It could also significantly reduce the strain on hospital beds."

The study is being managed by staff from the Clinical Research Support Centre in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and has been supported by the infrastructure provided by the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network. The Clinical Research Facility at NUI Galway is providing additional support. The study is taking place over four years in approximately 25 other intensive care units throughout the UK and Ireland.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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