



FLINDERS
MEDICAL
CENTRE



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the internal newsletter of Flinders Medical Centre

Flinders recruiting patients for national stroke study

Flinders Medical Centre has been selected to take part in a national study that will test the effectiveness of very early rehabilitation for patients who have had a stroke.

Flinders is one of 10 hospitals across the country to be involved in the final phase of the study. Known as AVERT (A Very Early Rehabilitation Trial), the study is an initiative of the National Stroke Research Institute.

The randomised, controlled trial will test whether starting intensive rehabilitation very early after stroke results in fewer deaths and less disability than current methods of care and rehabilitation.

Physiotherapy and nursing staff in the Acute Neurological Care and Elderly Rehabilitation (ANCER) Unit at Flinders are involved in the trial.

ANCER Unit Allied Health Team Leader and Main Investigator **Julie Luker** said patients who have had a stroke and are admitted within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms will be invited to take part in the study. Half of the patients will be treated according to current best practice



Research Physiotherapist Craig Wood with a patient in the ANCER Unit.

while the remaining patients will begin earlier and more intensive rehabilitation during their stay in hospital. Patients will be followed up for 12 months after discharge.

'Stroke patients admitted to Flinders already begin rehabilitation early,' Julie said. 'But this trial is based on a Scandinavian model of care that starts more intensive rehabilitation even earlier.'

The Flinders AVERT team aim to enrol at least 50 patients each year over the next four years.

AVERT Program Director, Associate Professor **Julie Bernhardt** said the protocol to be followed in this trial has been developed and trialled during the past five years. 'Now it's time to test whether it works in the real world,' she said.

The final phase of the trial will involve over 2000 patients and 30 investigators from across Australia.

'Without the co-operation and commitment of a large number of people, this trial would not exist.'