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**NATIONAL
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News Release

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STROKE REHABILITATION RESEARCH GOES INTERNATIONAL

A new stroke rehabilitation research program (called AVERT) that provides early exercise therapy within 24 hours of stroke has commenced at Auckland City Hospital. “We have found that exercise therapy (with a focus on mobilization) can be started very early, patients are not too tired and it appears safe”, said Dr Julie Bernhardt, physiotherapist and AVERT Program Director. “We are now testing the benefits of very early stroke rehabilitation in Australia and are moving to include overseas centres. The Auckland City Hospital stroke unit team have provided enthusiastic support and are the very first international hospital to join our research team.”

While there have been many studies looking at the impact of different medications after stroke, no high quality trials have looked at whether a very early rehabilitation program results in fewer deaths and less disability than current care. Very early rehabilitation program is delivered by physiotherapy and nursing staff. People who get to Auckland City Hospital within 24 hours of a stroke may be eligible for the trial.

AVERT is an large multi-centre randomised trial that aims to recruit over 2000 stroke patients over the next three years. Australia and New Zealand centres are underway, with planned centres in Canada and Scotland. The AVERT trial is an initiative of the National Stroke Research Institute, Melbourne, Australia. Grant support was provided by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council of AUS\$2.8 million funding the 5 year trial.

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