

AVERT Newsletter - June 2005



This newsletter is for everyone who is a part of the AVERT project. We commenced AVERT (a carefully controlled trial of early rehabilitation after stroke) in March 2004 at the **Austin Hospital, Heidelberg**. In early May 2005, we started AVERT at another site at **St. Vincent's Hospital, Fitzroy**. To date we have recruited 58 patients to the trial, with a target of 120 by March 2006.

We have a growing team of patients, supporters and staff. The AVERT team include:

- people living with stroke who have agreed to participate;
- family and carers of stroke survivors who support the research;
- stroke unit medical and therapy staff at the Austin and St. Vincent's who provide essential voluntary support;
- AVERT physiotherapy and nursing staff in each stroke unit;
- investigators at the **National Stroke Research Institute** who manage the trial;
- interested staff from other centres that may come on board in the next phase of the trial, and several committees to evaluate ongoing progress

Achievements for 2004-2005

It has been an exciting year for us. By the end of 2004, we were successful with a number of prestigious grants that have allowed us to keep the AVERT trial going.

- The **National Heart Foundation** (\$116,000) and **Affinity Health** (\$50,000) have provided funding for staffing and equipment. For example, this money provides funding for AVERT staff in each stroke unit and travel costs for our blinded assessor, Dorcas Quah to visit stroke survivors at home.
- The **Austin Health Medical Research Fund** (\$7,500) provided funding for high quality wheelchairs and cushions. This equipment improves patient comfort and safety with a tray for arm support and bottom pressure care. The wheelchair also has a special movable seat so that the nurse or physiotherapists don't have to lift patients back into the chair.
- We had a few important donations from individuals in support of the trial. All contributions have been put to good use.
- Tara Sharpley, AVERT physiotherapist at Austin Hospital was awarded the **FJ O'Rourke Fellowship**. This money has funded a study trip to Trondheim, Norway to complete a project as part of her Masters by Research, that will help us learn more about how early rehabilitation is delivered in this centre of excellence.
- We have talked about AVERT to therapists, nurses and doctors at stroke units and conferences in Australia, Britain, Norway, Italy, Spain, and Singapore.
- We have also had some attention from the media. Dr Julie Bernhardt's article in the prestigious journal **Stroke** was the focus of an **International Press** report in 2004. She also featured in the **Heidelberg Leader** in April 2005. Tara Sharpley's award was promoted by **The Age** in March 2005.

What's happening next?

By early 2006 we will have completed recruitment for this phase of AVERT. It will then take another 12 months for all of our follow up data to be completed, before we have final results from this phase of the study. We have applied for a grant from the **National Health and Medical Research Council** to fund the continuation of the study in a further 10 Australian stroke units but won't know the results of this application until later in 2005. We'll keep you posted of our progress.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this excellent outcome: stroke survivors, carers, doctors, nurses, therapists and alike.

If you would like to contact us, please call Dr Julie Bernhardt (Principal Investigator) on 03 9496 2783



National Stroke Research Institute