

AVERT Newsletter

No. 3. July 2006



Report from the Program Director, Dr Julie Bernhardt

Since our last newsletter we have seen many changes at our base here at the National Stroke Research Institute.

AVERT Phase 2

We had seventy one stroke patients from the Austin Hospital and St Vincent's Hospital who agreed to participate in AVERT Phase 2 and we stopped enrolment in March 2006. This pilot study looked at the feasibility of providing an early rehabilitation program to patients who came to hospital within 24 hours of stroke. We also looked at recovery from stroke and the costs of stroke. Dorcas Quah (our assessor) is still visiting some stroke patients for the 12 month follow-ups.

Right now we are reviewing information about patient outcomes up to 3 months after stroke and will aim to have these results published by early 2007. Next year we will have the 12 months results. In May this year, I presented some preliminary results from AVERT Phase 2 in Brussels, Belgium at the European Stroke Conference. I look forward to being able to talk more about these results in the next newsletter.

Our thanks go to all the staff, patients and families that have been involved in the Phase 2 study over the last 2 years. The information we have gathered over this time has made an enormous contribution to improving and developing the next phase of the trial, AVERT Phase 3. This final study will run over the next 5 years and needs to

be of the highest quality possible. All our preparatory work will help make it so. A high quality Phase 3 trial will (if early rehabilitation is of proven benefit) help us get the intervention into practice.

AVERT Phase 3

After we received the \$2.8 million grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council, we were able to start planning the next phase (Phase 3) of AVERT. This phase will examine the benefits and costs of very early rehabilitation for acute stroke patients across Australia. So far, the following hospital stroke units have agreed to participate:

- Austin Hospital, Vic
- Royal Melbourne Hospital, Vic
- West Gippsland Hospital, Vic
- Royal Perth Hospital, WA
- Flinders Medical Centre, SA
- Newcastle Mater Misericordiae, NSW
- Royal Prince Alfred, NSW
- Westmead Hospital, NSW
- Wyong Hospital, NSW

Three new staff have joined our team. Fiona Ellery who has taken the role of Trial Manager (page 2), Marcus Nicol is our Data Manager (page 3) and Berny Sirgo has come on board part time to help with administration. We also have a volunteer, John Van Holsteyn who is helping us out one day a week.

The team have all been working really hard to get ready for Phase 3. It's been a very busy and exciting time!



Mavis Price: Her personal story

The first time Mavis recognised that there was something wrong was back in August 2004 when she went to pick a pen up off the bench to write an address down. She realized she couldn't write and said to her husband "Don, I think I've had a stroke". Within the next hour her speech deteriorated and she began slurring her words and became unsteady on her feet, and Don convinced her to go to the Austin Hospital.

She says she agreed to participate in AVERT because she thought it would help other people who may have a stroke in the future. "I was just darn lucky. My stroke wasn't bad. I know some people are affected much more. I just wanted to help."



Now, almost 2 years later, and after a period at a rehabilitation centre, Mavis feels she still has some problems with undoing lids and picking up some objects, but has improved enough to help Don with the weeding and looking after their large garden, which she loves. Mavis felt that "You mollycoddle yourself after a stroke, and exercise must have helped, when you think about it." We thank Mavis for participating in AVERT.

Meet new team member: Fiona Ellery **AVERT Trial Manager**



Fiona has the essential role of providing information and help to all of our clinical champions out at the AVERT hospitals and no doubt many of you will get to know her in person over the coming weeks.

Fiona is a registered nurse who worked for many years as a clinical trials research coordinator in the Neurology department of the Austin Hospital. She went on to work in the pharmaceutical industry for over 10 years as a clinical research associate for a Swiss based company, and then later as a part time consultant with a contract research organisation.

Fiona joined the AVERT team at the beginning of this year and has greatly enjoyed her return to investigator initiated research projects. Fiona's role in AVERT is to manage the day-to-day running of AVERT Phase 3. Fiona will be the first port of call in many instances for all AVERT staff having issues or have any questions relating to AVERT.

AVERT Local (hospital) staff are encouraged to contact her for any help or assistance that you may require. Fiona will be visiting the AVERT hospitals from time to time to monitor the progress of the study at each site.

Email: fellery@nsri.org.au

Phone: 03 9496 2897



Meet new team member: Marcus Nicol Data Manager



Marcus has developed the patient data forms that will be used to gather data from over 2000 stroke patients. Patients are given a unique trial code so that no identifying data is collected. Patient data forms are faxed from Local AVERT sites (hospitals) to the computer pictured above, stored as an image, checked by Marcus and transferred into an electronic database. Marcus is currently testing this very clever system.

Meet the Austin stroke unit team who are supporting AVERT Phase 3



The Austin AVERT team: (from Left) Brooke Cohen, Karen Rodman, Lisa Hegarty, Tara Sharpley (Suzanne Sertori not pictured)

Tara Sharpley: Tara has been a physiotherapist at Austin Health for 7 years, and has been involved with AVERT since 2004. She is also undertaking her Masters in Science by Research examining Differences in Stroke Unit Care: Melbourne versus Trondheim.

Lisa Hegarty: Lisa is a RN Division 2 nurse, who has been working at the Austin for 4 years and has worked on the stroke unit for the last two and a half years. In addition to completing the Neurosciences Short Course, she is the “No Lift Trainer” on the ward. Lisa has been involved with AVERT since 2004.

Brooke Cohen: Brooke is a RN Division 1 nurse, and has just completed her graduate year. She has been working in the Stoke Unit at Austin Health for 6 months.

Karen Rodway: Karen is a Division 1 nurse. She trained at the Alfred Hospital from 1984-1987 and worked at the Alfred for a few years before having children. She worked in nursing homes, until October when she made the serendipitous move to the Austin. She did the refresher course on the stroke unit and has since stayed on part-time.

Suzanne Sertori: Suzanne is a RN Division 2 nurse and has been involved with AVERT since 2004. She has worked at the Austin for 9 years and in the Stroke Unit for three and a half years. Prior to that, she completed a Diploma in Rehabilitation at Ballarat University.

Investigators Meeting

Prior to the nation wide launch of Phase 3 we have invited local AVERT teams from all committed Australian sites to a Welcome Dinner and Investigators Workshop. We will give a thorough outline of the study and provide training necessary to run AVERT at each site. It will be an opportunity to meet the AVERT Central team, here at the NSRI, as well as Local AVERT teams who have been involved with Phase 2 of the study.

Welcome Dinner: Thursday 13th July, from 6:30 pm

Meeting: Friday 14th July, 8:45am-5pm

Airport Motel and Convention Centre
33 Ardlie St,
Attard, Victoria



Further information on AVERT can be viewed on the National Stroke Research Institute website at <http://www.nsri.org.au/>

The Very Early Rehabilitation Stroke Research Program

Reducing both the personal and community burden of stroke is a primary driver of the very early rehabilitation research program. Our research program has the largest randomised controlled trial of very early rehabilitation (AVERT) at its core. We aim to establish the efficacy, cost effectiveness and potential mechanisms of very early rehabilitation.

Key development objectives are to

- Develop successful partnerships with professional organisations, policy makers, consumers, clinicians and researchers to promote *real changes* to clinical practice based on evidence
- Become a *world-class* stroke research program
- *Publish* significant research findings in high impact journals
- Attract and *supervise* high quality national and international post graduate students
- *Increase capacity* for high quality research within nursing and allied health disciplines
- *Develop* new technologies for use in clinical research trials



Picture: Some of the AVERT team celebrating a successful grant application for Phase 3 awarded by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council in October 2005. From the left: Janice Collier (Program Manager), Carolyn Luke (Research Physiotherapist Phase 2, St. Vincent's Hospital), Dorcas Quah (Research Officer), Julie Bernhardt (Program Director).

