

AVERT Newsletter

No 7. July 2008



Making progress: AVERT is now the largest stroke rehabilitation trial ever – but we still have a long way to go!

Welcome to another newsletter that tells you, our supporters, about progress over the last six months. The AVERT very early rehabilitation trial has now been running for two years and we can be really proud of what we have been able to achieve together. Our goal is to recruit 2104 patients with stroke and follow their progress over 12 months. We have now recruited

311 patients.

A fantastic achievement, making us the largest stroke rehabilitation trial ever conducted. But we need to grow even more if we are to complete the trial (and get to an answer about the effectiveness of implementing very early rehabilitation) within the next few years.

We now have 13 metropolitan, regional and rural hospitals in Australia and New Zealand participating and have commenced recruiting patients (see figures below).

Current AVERT sites

AUSTRALIA

Austin Hospital VIC	80
Frankston Hospital VIC	13
^{new} Geelong Hospital VIC	6
Royal Melbourne Hospital VIC	46
West Gippsland Hospital VIC	10
Flinders Medical Centre SA	23
Newcastle Mater Hospital NSW	5
Westmead Hospital NSW	28
Wyong Hospital NSW	10
Royal Perth Hospital WA	68
^{new} Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital WA	4
Wesley Hospital QLD	8

NEW ZEALAND

^{new}Auckland City Hospital 10

Our goal is to have **30 hospitals** by the end of 2008. This will build our trial community and help us achieve recruitment goals.

This year, we have continued to develop better systems to help our enthusiastic and dedicated AVERT hospital teams, both here and overseas, manage the demands of the trial, supported post graduate research students and visiting fellows interested in the study of early rehabilitation. It is a huge challenge, but an exciting one!

In this newsletter we:

- Celebrate becoming the largest stroke rehabilitation trial ever, when the Royal Perth Hospital recruited patient 223 in February 2008
- Give you an update about progress with AVERT Scotland
- Introduce the 18 new hospitals who have agreed to become part of the AVERT collaboration
- Showcase a few of our research fellows who have been working with us over the past 6-12 months.
- Share a tale of a participant in our trial
- As well as giving you an update on our activities that we have undertaken to promote trial progress both here and overseas.

Thank You

Thanks to all of you who have supported the trial over the past 2 years, through donations, in kind support and support of our trialists. A special thank you goes to all of our terrific local hospital teams, participants and their carers for their role in supporting efforts to improve the care of people with a stroke. The AVERT Trialists Collaboration is growing, at last count there were about 250 members of the team in Australia and overseas and the number is growing by the day!



National Stroke Research Institute



AVERT Scotland: Not a wee job to get going...but we're almost there!

In our December newsletter we celebrated the success of a grant to Chest, Heart and Stroke, Scotland to fund five hospitals to participate in AVERT. Louise Craig started as our Scottish Trial Manager in January and travelled to Melbourne to meet the team and be trained in all things AVERT. The trial has been very well received in Scotland with Louise initially spending much of her time engaging in discussions with interested hospitals. AVERT has been granted ethics approval by the main committee and is now awaiting approval from the local hospitals. Louise is aiming to prepare the sites and train all the enthusiastic staff in the AVERT protocols during September ready for mass recruitment thereafter.

There are many other hospitals who have indicated an interest in becoming involved from other parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have needed to develop some clever systems to help Louise and the UK hospitals manage the study locally and communicate effectively and this seems to be working well.

Starting soon at a hospital near you: Other new AVERT sites

International interest in the trial is growing. New Zealand was our first overseas site but in addition to Scotland, we will soon be starting in Canada, Singapore and Thailand. Further Australian sites are also coming on board. The 18 hospitals in the process of getting ethics approval; receiving start up training or have yet to commence recruiting are listed below.

New AVERT sites

AUSTRALIA

Liverpool Hospital, NSW
St. Vincent's Hospital, NSW
Dubbo Base Hospital, NSW
Belmont Hospital, NSW
Wollongong Hospital, NSW
Gosford Hospital, NSW
Nambour, QLD
Hobart, TAS
Warrnambool, VIC
Western Hospital, VIC

CANADA

Grey Nuns Hospital, Edmonton
Palliser Health, Alberta

New AVERT sites

SCOTLAND

Monklands Hospital, Lanarkshire
Stirling Royal Infirmary, Stirling
Western Infirmary, Glasgow
Wishaw General Hospital, Lanarkshire

SINGAPORE

Singapore General Hospital

THAILAND

Bangkok Hospital Medical Centre

Noeleen's Stroke Story

Noeleen was preparing for bed one evening three months ago when she had her stroke. When the room began to spin and she started vomiting she wasn't sure what was wrong. She doesn't really remember phoning her friend for help, but remembers being worried about her dogs as she was taken to hospital. Noeleen agreed to participate in the AVERT stroke trial and feels she is helping in research which may help stroke patients in the future.

After time at rehab, Noeleen returned home to her dogs and birds. She still had some problems with her balance and found that one of the most difficult things to do at that time was getting outside to the aviary to feed her birds. Noeleen now has no problems walking outside her house and has gradually ventured further around her large block. Her advice is to "think positive and not think that you won't get better".



Noeleen decided when she came home that she needed to keep herself occupied. She wants to tell other stroke survivors that "there's no point sitting at home looking at the four walls". Before her stroke she was very involved in voluntary work in her local community. She is already back helping at the crèche at the local community centre and was welcomed by her many friends recently when working at a fundraising sausage sizzle. Getting out into the community and back into her voluntary work has given Noeleen a focus other than her stroke. Although she is able to do most of the things



she could do before the stroke, she is not yet allowed to drive. She is looking forward to the time when she can drive again and do the volunteer driving that she has enjoyed so much over several years.

Visiting Research Fellow, Dr Linden, interested in mood and thinking ability (cognition) after stroke

Dr Thomas Linden is a Medical Doctor specialising in neurology and psychiatry. He moved to Melbourne from Gothenburg, Sweden with his family (including 3 teenagers) in December and will stay for 12 months.



Throughout 2008, Thomas is working with the AVERT team, in particular Dr Toby Cumming, a postdoctoral fellow, to develop evaluations of a person's thinking ability after stroke, as well as mood. Thomas and his family are avid explorers. They have already seen more of Victoria than all of the AVERT staff combined!

Activity levels early after stroke



Sharon Kramer

**Masters Student
Physiotherapy Science
Utrecht University
The Netherlands**

After working for 6 years as a physiotherapist, I started a Masters degree in physiotherapy science (2006). First I completed some study in the Netherlands before travelling to Australia in September 2007 to do a research project under Julie Bernhardt's supervision at the National Stroke Research Institute (NSRI).

Earlier research from the NSRI had shown that patients in the first two weeks after stroke spent a lot of time in bed (more than 50% of the day) and little time (13%) doing standing and walking exercise that might help them recover from a stroke. This research used a person to observe and record what the patient was doing

every 10 minutes from 8:00-17:00. As you can imagine, this is very time consuming!

The focus of my research has been to see if there is an easier way to accurately measure physical activity after stroke. A new small electronic device (PAL2™) which is worn on one leg and registers movements such as lying down, standing and walking had potential as an activity monitor in stroke.



Observation or device? Sharon aims to find out which is better for measuring activity.

We measured activity in non-AVERT patients using observation (the current method) and the PAL2 (possibly easier method) at the same time, at two time points (within a week of stroke and four weeks after stroke). My study found that stroke patients still spend 50% of the day lying down in bed within the first two weeks after stroke and little time (less than 10%) standing and walking. Surprisingly, by four weeks after stroke, little had changed. The device worked well and gave similar information to an observer, although there remain some technical problems that we are working to fix with the developer, Michael Gorman. Patients also found the device comfortable to wear.

I have now completed my thesis and passed (which has made me very happy!) and will be presenting the results of my research at the Stroke Society of Australasia Conference in Sydney in August.

This last year has been a great journey. I have learned a lot about research. I feel very privileged to have worked with Julie and the motivated, smart and very kind people of the AVERT team. A lot of good work has been done but there is still a lot of research needed to improve rehabilitation after stroke and I hope that I can contribute to this process in the future.



Telling people about AVERT

Here are some of the highlights of our communications with the public for 2008 so far.

Scientific Publications

Our key publication of the Phase II safety results was accepted for publication in the journal *Stroke* in February 2008. *Stroke* is highly rated in the scientific community. This publication has been featured on a number of internet health and research web sites. The news service, Reuters Health saw the publication and ran a story. The McMaster Online Rating of Evidence (MORE) rated the paper as 'stellar' and it was also ranked as a 'must read' by the Faculty of 1000 Medicine.

Scientific Conferences

Members of the AVERT team have presented the results of the Phase II (pilot) study completed in 2006, as well as progress reports for the Phase III trial to the medical, allied health and nursing communities at a number of conferences including:

- International Stroke Conference, New Orleans, USA
- European Stroke Conference, Nice, France
- Welsh Stroke Conference, Wales UK.

The US stroke trials register **The INTERNET STROKE CENTRE** updated the details of the AVERT trial following Julie's presentation of data at the International Stroke Conference in New Orleans. At the European Stroke Conference, journalist Caroline Cassels from Medscape (who has shown an interest in AVERT in the past) tracked Julie down for an interview and wrote a very nice piece about the trial for the Medscape web page.

Community media about stroke

When Jacqui Ancliffe (Main Investigator) recruited patient number 223 at the Royal Perth Hospital team (making AVERT the biggest stroke rehabilitation trial ever) she organised a picture and story for the March hospital newsletter. This story was featured in the West Australian Wanneroo Times in April. Following on from this, Jacqui was invited for an interview on Radio Fremantle to talk about the AVERT

trial and acute stroke care. The importance of recognising stroke using the FAST message (Face, Arm, Speech, Time to call an ambulance) and getting to hospital early featured strongly.

At the Royal Perth Hospital, Jacqueline Ancliffe (AVERT Main Investigator) with Robert Vreed-enburgh who is the record breaking AVERT stroke patient.



In Memorium Donations

We greatly appreciate the donations from Mrs Lee Johnstone and Jillian and Glen Fidler. Their donations in memory of Mr Fyfe Thorpe were used to purchase special cushions to help make people more comfortable sitting out of bed as part of their early rehabilitation care.

Our stroke rehabilitation research relies solely on getting grants from various granting bodies or philanthropic sources. If you are keen to assist us financially, all donations are tax deductible and can be made by calling the NSRI (9496 2888).

Want to contribute?

This newsletter showcases some of the ways people have become involved in the AVERT Research Program. We thank you all for your contribution. If you would like to assist in any way (research collaborations, volunteer work, financial support, contributions to this newsletter etc) we would love to hear from you.

Want to know more?

If you want to read in detail about any of these publications and conferences, news stories, and pod casts, these are available on our web site

<http://www.nsri.org.au/avert.htm>

Other queries can be directed to avert@nsri.org.au or by phoning +613 9496 2844.

By giving your contact details and email address to your blinded assessor at your 12 month follow up visit, you can continue to receive further updates about the trial. Be sure to mention this at your follow up visit if you wish to continue to hear more.

