



AVERT Newsletter



No 8. December 2008

Welcome to our 6 monthly newsletter that aims to keep you up to date with information about A Very Early Rehabilitation Trial (AVERT). We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support throughout 2008.

In this newsletter we:

- Tell you about our progress over 2008 and plans for 2009
- Report on stroke survivor experiences of being part of AVERT
- Showcase our graduate students and international visiting research fellows
- Update you on the activities we have undertaken to let people know about our research both here and overseas

Progress in 2008

The AVERT very early rehabilitation trial has now been running for over 2 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 by the end of 2010. We have now recruited:

376 Patients

16 Australian hospitals are now trained and able to recruit, with a further **7 Australian hospitals** awaiting final ethics approval and training. These include Alfred and Western Hospitals (VIC), Belmont, Dubbo Base, Liverpool, and St Vincent's Hospitals (NSW) and Nambour Hospital (QLD).

Due to slower than expected recruitment, one of our goals for 2008 was to increase the number of hospitals involved in the study to 30 to help us reach our target. Our first international site came on board this year:

New Zealand - Auckland joined the team in February.

We have also now expanded into:

Scotland - 4 hospitals now committed. We have also got a trial manager placed in Glasgow who will manage these and potentially other UK sites.

International commitment has also extended to 6 other hospitals including:

Canada - Grey Nuns Hospital and Palliser Health (Alberta)

Wales - Neville Hall and Royal Gwent Hospital

Singapore - Singapore General Hospital

Malaysia - UKM Medical Centre.

Northern Ireland Following a successful local application for funding to run the trial, approximately 4 hospitals will also join the team.

This will bring our total number of sites to **38!**

We have had a few other hospitals also express interest in being involved, and we are currently in discussions with them.

Adding new hospitals to the trial means a lot of hard work by our small AVERT central team, and also the staff at each of the new hospitals, so we have done exceptionally well to build the trial to this extent during the year.

The **main goal for 2009** will be to continue to make sure all our current systems run smoothly. With the additional international sites, we need to continually make small changes to ensure that our international sites are catered for.

A very important goal for us in 2009 is to ensure that our hospitals all recruit as many patients as possible. The sooner all 2104 patients have been recruited to the trial, the sooner we can finish and start looking at the data and presenting results to you.



National Stroke Research Institute



Current AVERT sites

| AUSTRALIA |
|--|
| Austin Hospital VIC |
| Flinders Medical Centre SA |
| Frankston Hospital VIC |
| Geelong Hospital VIC |
| ^{new} Gosford Hospital NSW |
| Royal Melbourne Hospital VIC |
| West Gippsland Hospital VIC |
| ^{new} Warrnambool Hospital VIC |
| Newcastle Mater Hospital NSW |
| Westmead Hospital NSW |
| ^{new} Wollongong Hospital NSW |
| Wyong Hospital NSW |
| ^{new} Royal Hobart Hospital TAS |
| Royal Perth Hospital WA |
| Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital WA |
| Wesley Hospital QLD |
| NEW ZEALAND |
| Auckland City Hospital |
| SCOTLAND |
| ^{new} Monklands Hospital Lanarkshire |
| ^{new} Stirling Royal Infirmary Stirling |
| ^{new} Western Infirmary Glasgow |
| ^{new} Wishaw General Hospital Lanarkshire |

A new arm to our study

We have been very interested in looking at thinking processes for patients who have had a stroke, and following the addition of Dr Toby Cumming and Dr Thomas Linden (Sweden) to our team, we have come up with an additional test that will be given to all new patients at their 3 month visit. It is a very quick and easy to administer test called the MoCA (Montreal Cognitive Assessment). We hope that this additional test will give us some insight into whether there is any change in thinking processes for people who have had a stroke.

Stroke survivor experiences of being in AVERT



This year **Lisa Steinfeld** from RMIT University, conducted a pilot study looking at the consumer experience of participating in AVERT. This study aimed to find

out what patients and their families felt about being involved in the trial and why they decided to agree to participate.

People who had completed the 12 month follow up of the study were invited to participate and we had responses from 19 families. We found that patients and their families decided to participate in the trial for a number of reasons including the possibility that it might help them and that the findings of this study could help others. We were pleased to see that participants felt they had enough time to make up their minds about participating in the study. There were very positive responses to the assessor's visits and to rehabilitation received in hospital. This study has helped give us some insights into the experience of participating in a trial from the perspective of both the patient and their family.

Thanks to all those who participated.

Quality of life after stroke



Karen Tyedin
Honours Student
School of Physiotherapy
La Trobe University
Victoria, Australia

During the final two years of my physiotherapy course, I undertook an Honours Research Project under the supervision of Dr Julie Bernhardt and Dr Toby Cumming at the National Stroke Research Institute. My research topic looked at the effect of early rehabilitation on quality of life in the first 12 months following stroke.

Quality of life is a broad concept incorporating physical, psychological and social perceptions. The experience of stroke can impact both the individual and family, influencing many aspects of life. The aim of my research was to investigate whether an early and active rehabilitation program for stroke patients could help to improve quality of life.

We found that early rehabilitation may improve quality of life in stroke survivors, particularly in relation to independent physical function. Including quality of life assessment in stroke trials can help to strengthen knowledge of life after stroke. Further investigation into quality of life is currently underway in the larger phase III AVERT study.



Completing my Honours Research Project has been an enjoyable and rewarding experience. I have learnt valuable research skills and really important life skills about the importance of quality of life and stroke care management. It has been great to be part of a team working in such an exciting area of research and doing excellent things to benefit the stroke community.

Clinician's Views about Early Rehabilitation



**Monica Skarin
Anna Sjöholm**

Sweden

For ten weeks, AVERT central in Melbourne enjoyed the addition of two Swedish physiotherapy students here to do research. They set out to explore what opinions and beliefs underlie decisions on early rehabilitation of stroke patients. They hit Australian soil running, starting their project at the joint Australasian Stroke Society and SmartStrokes meeting in Sydney in August. In three days they interviewed over 200 stroke care professionals. Some of the preliminary findings indicate that there are more concerns about early out of bed activity for people with strokes that are caused by bleeds than for those caused by blood-clots in the brain. Another finding is that stroke professionals really are left with making decisions on early rehabilitation without much solid science to support it, which indicates that whatever results the AVERT trial will produce will quickly be utilised and soon be of benefit to stroke patients all over the world. Some of the results have already been published at a scientific conference in Europe and written reports will hopefully show up during next year. We wish Anna and Monica all the best in their future careers.



Monica with a clinician at the conference

Grant successes

Research Equipment Grant

The stroke unit at Flinders Medical Centre was successful in getting a \$5,000 research equipment grant from the South Australian government to buy a whiz-bang tilt-in-space wheelchair. This grant application was supported by AVERT as the wheelchair helps therapists to get patients up and out of bed and engaged in more activity than previously possible. Patients also report that the chair is comfortable which helps them to sit out of bed more often. **We are always on the lookout for opportunities to support the purchase of equipment by our teams.**



Pictured Craig Wood (AVERT Physio) and Belinda Penn (fantastic Physio Assistant) demonstrating the new wheelchair.

Telling people about AVERT

Here are some of the highlights of our communications with the research community and general public in 2008.

Scientific Publications for 2008

We were able to publish key results on the Phase II (pilot) trial (see website for details)

- Early exercise appears safe and feasible in *Stroke* in February.
- Early exercise improves mood at 7 days post stroke in *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* in September.
- How should you monitor therapy 'dose' in *Brain Impairment* in October.
- Early rehabilitation appears to save money in *Cerebrovascular Diseases* in November.
- Review of all that we know of early rehabilitation in *Annals of Indian Neurology*.



Scientific Conferences

Julie Bernhardt, Director the Very Early Rehabilitation Research Program, presented progress reports for the Phase III trial to the medical, allied health and nursing communities at a number of conferences. Julie Bernhardt, Toby Cummings and Janice Collier have presented results from the Phase II study. Main investigators, Ruth Chen (Westmead NSW), Felicity Leavold (Frankston VIC), Rhonda Hardy-Joel (Grey Nuns Canada) and UK Trial Manager Louise Craig (Scotland) have presented on the impact of AVERT at their own hospitals. Presentations were at the following conferences.

- International Stroke Conference, New Orleans, USA
- European Stroke Conference, Nice, France
- Welsh Stroke Conference, Wales, UK.
- Stroke Society of Australasia, Sydney, AUS
- Australasian Neuroscience Nurses Association, Bondi, AUS
- Alberta Stroke Conference, Alberta, Canada

Community media about stroke

When new hospitals start the AVERT research, local media will often profile the research. In Auckland, NOVA (the official newsletter for the Auckland District Health Board) described Auckland City Hospital as the first international site to joint AVERT. In November, the BBC news in Scotland described the start of AVERT in Scottish hospitals which was fantastic.

Our research findings on improved mood in VEM patients at 7 days after stroke have been of interest to the health news community. Toby Cumming (lead author) was interviewed by: (i) Caroline Cassels from Medscape Medical News; (ii) Megan Rauscher from Reuters Health; and (iii) Rick Chillot from Rodale. These interviews have been reported and syndicated far and wide via the print media and the internet. Some examples include Human Services News (Victoria Health Services Newsletter), Advancements in Cognitive Psychology, Tehran Times, Iran Daily, Reuters US, Reuters UK and WebMD Medical News in the US and China.

Our AVERT team have also been involved throughout the year with promoting knowledge of stroke symptoms and the need to get to hospital as soon as possible after stroke. For example, the sudden death of theatre legend,

Rob Guest due to stroke provoked a lot of media interest in knowledge about stroke prevention and symptoms.



Julie Bernhardt represented the National Stroke Foundation in an interview with Kerri-Anne Kennerley on 6 October 2008 on *Mornings with Kerri-Anne* (Channel 9).

Details of all our AVERT news stories are available at our web site.

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

Donations

We have greatly appreciated recent generous donations from the following people:

Mrs. Noeleen Griffiths

Mrs. Ronda Hall

The money received from these sources is directed towards providing our involved sites with new equipment specifically used for the care of stroke patients. Specialised wheelchairs, cushions and other medical equipment used for the care of the stroke patient are some of the purchases we aim to make with any of your kind donations.

Our stroke rehabilitation research relies solely on getting grants from various granting bodies or philanthropic sources. If you are keen to assist us financially, it would be greatly appreciated. All donations are tax deductible and can be made by calling the NSRI (+61 3 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.



National Stroke Research Institute

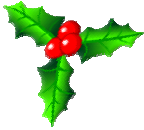


Want to know more?

We are currently in the process of developing a new website that will make it easier to find out more about AVERT. We'll keep you posted.

If you have any queries about our program you can e-mail avert@nsri.org.au or phone +613 9496 2888.

If you are a participant in the AVERT trial, you may wish to give your contact details and email address to your blinded assessor at your 12 month follow up visit, and we will make sure that you continue to receive further updates about the trial.



We would like to take this opportunity to wish you, your friends and family a very Merry Christmas and a safe, happy and healthy New Year.



From the AVERT Central team!



National Stroke Research Institute

