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**NATIONAL
STROKE
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ABN 35 087 172 512

Media Release

19 September 2008

VERY EARLY EXERCISE AFTER STROKE HELPS MOOD

New research has shown that getting patients up, out of bed and walking soon after stroke helps mood symptoms. With current hospital care, more than 40% of patients report multiple symptoms of depression such as poor appetite, disturbed sleep and sadness in the first seven days after stroke. In contrast, only 20% of patients provided with an early active exercise program described symptoms of severe depression.

Dr Toby Cumming, a research fellow with the AVERT Very Early Rehabilitation Research Program, reports: "We found that patients provided with early out of bed mobility exercises during their hospital stay were less depressed". Ron, who was a member of the very early exercise group, said he was keen to get out of bed and move around following his stroke. He enjoyed the exercise sessions with the nurses and physiotherapist who would take him walking around the ward and up and down flights of stairs. He reflected "I've always been active; I enjoy gardening and doing things around the house. I don't like to sit around much." In the days following his stroke, Ron noticed that he sometimes became emotional and would shed tears more easily than before. According to his wife Margaret, the early rehabilitation exercises helped his mood: "It lifted him to be up and around, it made him feel that he wasn't incapacitated". This research is encouraging and suggests that something as simple as exercise early after stroke can minimise symptoms of depression.

The next phase of AVERT is underway and will involve over 2000 stroke patients from hospitals in Australia and overseas. The AVERT trial is an initiative of the National Stroke Research Institute, Melbourne. Initial grant support was provided by the National Heart Foundation, with an NHMRC grant of \$2.8 million funding the 5 year trial.

The September issue of the Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine features the article by Cumming et al, 2008: 'The effect of very early mobilisation after stroke on psychological well-being', pages 609-614.

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