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Media Statement

DRUG TRIAL AIMS TO EASE HEALTH SYSTEM BURDEN

WA doctors worried some patients' lives may be at risk from unnecessary medications hope a new research trial may pave the way for easing the burden on the public health system.

Clinical Pharmacologist Dr Christopher Beer from the WA Centre for Health and Ageing based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research said the study, now in its pilot phase, was looking at the benefits of de-prescribing medications.

"While medications obviously can be lifesaving, up to one in four people admitted to hospital in acute circumstances are brought in because of clinical problems linked to prescribed drugs they are taking," said Dr Beer.

"We suspect that many of these cases may be linked to patients taking medications that they no longer need, that aren't providing any health benefits, that may be causing harmful side effects or that may actually be reducing their quality of life.

The STOPAT Trial (Systematic Termination Of Pharmaceutical Agents Trial) would trial safely easing patients off medications they no longer needed, either because the medical condition the drugs were prescribed for was no longer present or because they had been incorrectly prescribed in the first place.

Dr Beer said the ultimate hope for the STOPAT Trial was that it would help improve patient health, and reduce the pressure on the health system.

"As well as hoping to decrease acute hospital admissions caused by prescribed drugs, we believe if we can reduce the number of people on unnecessary medications, we aim to also help improve health outcomes," he said.

"For example, research shows that, in elderly patients, taking them off some medications can lessen their chances of suffering falls, which are the leading cause of injury deaths and hospitalisations for Australians aged over 65."

Dr Beer said it was also the case that taking several medications simultaneously could be hazardous because of the possible side effects of the interactions of the drugs.

"As our population ages, the need to tackle these issues is growing exponentially," he said.

"This trial is all about formally proving what our clinical experience suggests, which is that withdrawing these drugs can benefit individual patients."

Eligible volunteers for the STOPAT Trial need to be aged 50 or older and taking blood pressure, heart, fluid or pain killing medicine which they are concerned may be unnecessary.

Trial co-investigators are Clinical Pharmacologists Prof Alasdair Millar and Dr PK Loh and Clinical Pharmacist Mr Yan Ghee Peng. **Potential volunteers should call Ms Rhana Arnold on 9224 1338.**

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