



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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MEDIA STATEMENT

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WA TEST SET TO BENEFIT MESOTHELIOMA PATIENTS

West Australian researchers have developed a new type of test that could predict very early on in treatment if mesothelioma patients will benefit from chemotherapy.

Up to 60 patients with the asbestos-related cancer will participate in a study of the test, which is being conducted at the National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR).

While chemotherapy is the most common treatment for people with mesothelioma, not all patients benefit from the treatment and side-effects are common.

However, it currently takes 3 to 4 cycles of chemotherapy (over three to four months) before doctors can determine if it will be effective.

Study Investigator Dr Anna Nowak from The University of Western Australia said a novel imaging test, using PET scanning technology, was being tested which she hoped would detect the patient's response to chemotherapy two to three months earlier than conventional CT scans.

"The beauty of this test is that it can be assessed after the first cycle of chemotherapy which usually takes about three to four weeks," Dr Nowak said.

"So, if successful, this scan will reveal early on which patients are going to benefit from chemotherapy and, importantly, avoid unnecessary toxicity to patients who will not have results from the treatment."

Dr Nowak said it was the way that mesothelioma grew that currently made it difficult to determine individual patient responses to chemotherapy.

"However, what we have discovered, is that the injection of a flurothymidine-labelled tracer is taken up by dividing mesothelioma cells," she said.

"As tumour cells divide more actively than normal cells, when a PET scan is performed it will show the tumour up as a 'hot spot'.

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“With this new test, we expect that if the tumour is going to respond to chemotherapy, the amount of flurothymidine in the tumour will reduce as early as after the first treatment, without the need to wait for the tumour to appear smaller on a CT scan.”

The research is one of many projects being conducted at the National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases to boost the potential for crucial advances in the screening and treatment of people at risk of cancers such as mesothelioma.

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$6.2 million to the Centre through the National Health and Medical Research Council, funding 11 research projects over three years, while UWA has contributed \$900,000 over three years.

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