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Media Statement

**NEW THERAPY OFFERS HOPE TO STROKE SURVIVORS**

With almost 60,000 Australians expected to suffer a stroke this year alone\*, a Perth research physiotherapist is calling for volunteers to help with a study that hopes to improve recovery for stroke survivors.

Dr Barby Singer, who is part of the Neurotrauma Research Program (NRP) based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), is exploring a new and inexpensive addition to physiotherapy treatment for people after stroke.

Dr Singer said her study set out to relieve calf stiffness and spasticity, which was a significant problem for many people following stroke and head injury, that made walking difficult, and at times painful, as well as increasing the risk of tripping and falling.

“This project will assess whether cyclic stretching of the ankle, using a continuous passive movement (CPM) device will effectively reduce the calf stiffness and make functional tasks like rising from a chair or walking, easier and less painful,” she said.

“CPM devices have long been used to reduce soft tissue and joint stiffness following orthopaedic surgical procedures, but their potential to help people suffering from brain injury or stroke has not yet been fully investigated.”

Almost 90 per cent of stroke survivors live at home and most have a disability.

In the next 10 years, more than half a million people will suffer a stroke, which, at present costs Australia an estimated \$2.14 billion a year.\*

Bassendean resident John Tassicker first suffered a stroke at 48 years of age in 2005 and a second in May this year, and has been taking part in Dr Singer’s study over the past two months.

“Whenever I leave the session with Dr Singer, my calf muscle is much more relaxed and easier to manipulate, which helps relieve the problems I have with foot drop,” he said.

“Although I haven’t been affected quite as much as most stroke survivors I know, I’ve had a real problem with foot drop that causes a lot of stress on my calf muscle, and that goes away after each session.

“This is the easiest exercise I’ve ever done, I just have to lay back and relax for 20 minutes, so I’d recommend anyone who can be a part of this, get in touch with Dr Singer.”

Dr Singer is searching for volunteers to progress her study and is asking stroke survivors who are able walk a short distance on their own but who have not recovered full control of the affected leg.

Travel assistance can be arranged.

To find out more about the study or to take part, please contact (08) 9224 0229.

**-MORE-**

*In 2008 WAIMR celebrates 10 years since its inception and the many internationally-important discoveries which have transformed it into WA's premier adult medical research institute.*



Dr Singer's project is one of a number of cutting-edge research projects tackling brain and spinal cord injuries which are being undertaken by NRP. The projects have been made possible thanks to an \$8 million funding boost over five years from the State Government.

The internationally-renowned NRP involves collaboration between neuroscientists from the University of Western Australia, Royal Perth, Sir Charles Gairdner and Princess Margaret Hospitals and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

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\*Source: National Stroke Foundation <http://www.strokefoundation.com.au/facts-figures-and-stats>

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