

24 September 2009



Media Statement

**WA RESEARCH GIVES INSIGHT INTO LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGY**

Unique research by WA researchers is raising hopes of unleashing new ways to tackle anaphylaxis – a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction commonly sparked by medications, insect venoms and foods such as peanuts, fish and eggs.

A study conducted by the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's Centre for Clinical Research in Emergency Medicine discovered the concentration of a number of molecules involved in the body's immune response were boosted in patients with these severe reactions.

The research, published in the Journal of Allergy & Clinical Immunology, found the molecules were linked to low blood pressure, a serious complication of anaphylaxis.

Centre head Professor Simon Brown said it was the first study in the world to study a large number of patients while they were actually experiencing severe reactions.

"Anaphylaxis comes on very suddenly and unexpectedly; this makes it difficult to study in humans," he said.

"This remarkable research was made possible by the efforts of doctors and nurses in eight Emergency Departments in Western Australia and New South Wales, who collected special blood samples while they were resuscitating these critically ill patients.

"Our findings will allow us to extend research efforts on these molecules and the genes that control their expression, to identify ways to predict who is at greatest risk and perhaps even preventing reactions in the first place."

Report lead author Dr Shelley Stone said that currently anaphylaxis was treated without the key processes involved being well understood.

"This research is a valuable step forward and, given that it's part of a larger study, we're hopeful it's just the first step in gleaning deeper insights into the causes of anaphylaxis," she said.

Anaphylaxis affects up to 15% of people at some time in their lives, with about 1 in 70 children affected by peanut allergies across the globe.

Across Australia, hospital admissions for anaphylaxis have been increasing by nearly nine per cent a year from 1993 to 2005.

It can occur immediately and without warning, affecting multiple organ systems with life-threatening symptoms including breathing difficulties, swelling of the tongue and throat, and loss of consciousness.

**-ends-**

**MEDIA CONTACT: Natalie Papadopoulos, WAIMR Media Consultant,  
m0407 984 435, o 9388 9280**