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Media Statement

WA RESEARCH REVEALS BRAIN INJURY-AMPHETAMINE LINK

New WA research has revealed that one in five young people seeking emergency medical attention related to amphetamine drug use in a recent study had abnormalities on brain scans.

The project, undertaken by the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's Centre for Clinical Research in Emergency Medicine, was carried out from April 2008 to July 2009.

Chief Investigator and University of Western Australia Professor Daniel Fatovich said 30 patients presenting to the emergency department of Royal Perth Hospital took part in the study.

"Thirty of those patients who had used drugs such as speed, ecstasy and crystal methamphetamine, underwent MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) brain scans and 20 per cent – one in five of them – were found to have brain abnormalities," he said.

"There is emerging evidence of serious long term effects from amphetamine use and this research is congruent with evidence that amphetamines cause brain injury.

"Drug use has a huge impact on the community so the hope is that this type of research can be used to help educate the community in public health and the serious long term effects of amphetamine use."

The men and women in the study had an average age of 27.

Professor Fatovich presented his findings earlier this week (Wednesday September 1) to the 17th Western Australian Drug and Alcohol 2010 Symposium being held at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle. The study is to be published in the Medical Journal of Australia on 6 September.

The research was funded by the Royal Perth Hospital Medical Research Foundation.

The Centre for Clinical Research in Emergency Medicine (CCREM) is focused on research activities within the spectrum of Emergency Medicine. More information is available at www.ccrem.org.au.

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