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Study probes answers to memory loss for problem drinkers

Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) have announced a new project which could have global implications for preventing memory loss and other neurological problems for problem drinkers.

Alcohol dependence rapidly reduces thiamine (i.e. Vitamin B1) levels among alcoholics, resulting in cognitive dysfunction and behavioural issues.

Menzies will work with the Alice Springs Hospital to investigate the relationship between thiamine deficiency and neurological impairment, and look at the impact of mid and high dose thiamine replacement therapy among 100 alcohol dependent patients over the next year.

Menzies Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dr Kylie Dingwall said an improved understanding of the specific impairments associated with different levels of thiamine deficiency could help to more accurately determine the appropriate thiamine dose, and reduce risk of brain injury and subsequently improve patient outcomes.

“Thiamine is currently given to alcohol affected patients as standard practice based on case studies and consensus of opinion, but there is no empirical evidence relating blood thiamine levels with cognitive functioning and questions about optimum dose and treatment duration remain,” Dr Dingwall said.

Dr Dingwall added “There has been little study of this in our Indigenous population which is critical as different populations can have differing responses to thiamine deficiency.”

Addiction Medicine Physician, Dr Jen Delima from Alice Springs Hospital will also take a lead role in the project.

“Not only will the results be relevant to alcohol affected patients in hospital, but also to alcohol affected patients entering residential rehabilitation or receiving outpatient treatment,” Dr Delima.

“Given the significance of alcohol related disorders in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, the project has global implications for alcohol affected patients.”

Dr Dingwall said that Mental Health Week should be a reminder to all that alcohol dependence continues to cause significant morbidity and mortality among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Territorians.

Dr Dingwall’s project *Cognitive Response to Thiamine Replacement Therapy in Alcohol Affected Patients in Alice Springs* will commence in November 2012.

For more information about mental health or where to get help go to:

- Beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or www.beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline on 131114 or www.lifeline.org.au
- Tamarind Centre NT on 08 8922 4988
- Top End Mental Health Services on 08 8999 4988.

Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative (NT) – www.menzies.edu.au/AIMHI

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Background:

Menzies School of Health Research is the national leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. It is the only medical research institute in the NT and the only one in Australia with a major focus on Indigenous health. Menzies has more than 300 staff working in over 60 communities in Central and Northern Australia, as well as developing countries in the region. Menzies is also a significant contributor to health education and research training. Its major research programs include infectious diseases, chronic diseases, environmental health, health services research, social determinants of health, mental health, and international health.