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Media Statement

NEW TRIAL AIMS TO REDUCE DIABETES IN KIDNEY TRANSPLANT PATIENTS

WA researchers are set to investigate if early intervention can help slash the number of kidney transplant patients who develop type 2 diabetes.

Local funding group Diabetes Research WA has awarded a \$75,000 grant to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital renal physician Dr Aron Chakera to conduct the trial.

Dr Chakera, who is also the head of translational renal research at the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research in Nedlands, said post-transplant diabetes mellitus (PTDM) affected up to one in two kidney transplant patients within a year of receiving their new organ.

“PTDM is linked to poorer graft and patient outcomes and an increased risk of death, so uncovering ways to reduce the number of patients who develop it is obviously very important,” said Dr Chakera.

PTDM is believed to be triggered by increased insulin resistance and reduced insulin secretion, both of which can be side effects of the immunosuppressive drugs given to transplant patients to reduce the chances of their body rejecting their new organ.

“Traditionally, doctors concerned about PTDM have started with lifestyle modifications for patients with other risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes such as obesity, and focused on optimising immunosuppressant therapy, progressing to drugs or insulin therapy to lower blood glucose levels if needed,” explained Dr Chakera.

“The concern with this approach is it exposes many patients to significantly elevated blood glucose levels for many weeks which can spark complications, with some studies showing high blood sugar in the immediate period after transplantation can be a risk factor for acute rejection.”

Dr Chakera said his clinical trial aimed to discover the best method for earlier introduction of medications to help stabilise blood sugar levels.

“By bringing insulin or the drug sitagliptin combined with metformin into the post-transplant treatment regime earlier, we believe we’ll be able to better protect the body’s insulin-producing beta cells and bring down the rates of PTDM,” he said.

Diabetes Research WA executive director Sherl Westlund said the charity was delighted to be able to fund such an important clinical trial.

“This research has the potential to pave the way for a much higher quality of life for kidney transplant recipients and reduce the burden of type 2 diabetes on these patients and the health system,” she said.

All non-diabetic Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital renal transplant recipients will be eligible to take part in the study.

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