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Media Statement



WA STUDY: MORTALITY RATE HIGHER FOR WOMEN WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES IN CHILDHOOD

WA research to be unveiled at the World Diabetes Congress in Melbourne has revealed women who develop type 1 diabetes as a child have a significantly higher mortality rate during early adulthood.

The study, funded by the Diabetes Research Foundation of WA (DRFWA), may help to turn the situation around by pinpointing those women who need closer care while still very young.

It was conducted by researchers from the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. Institute PhD student Matthew Cooper carried out the study with Clinical Associate Professor Liz Davis as lead researcher.

“Our study found that females with childhood onset type 1 diabetes have a higher mortality rate before the age of 40 that is 11 times higher than the general population,” he said.

“Poor control of blood sugar levels, low socio-economic status and four or more episodes of dangerously low blood glucose levels during their childhood years are key risk factors but women from medium socio-economic backgrounds were also at increased risk compared to women from high socio-economic backgrounds.”

A/Professor Davis said: “While the deaths were mainly not due to diabetes complications, we are concerned they are over represented by suicide and drug overdose. It is well established that about one third of adolescents have a mental health disease and it will be important to explore the association between mental health disease and mortality.”

DRFWA executive director Sherl Westlund said the results highlighted that more must be done to transform the situation.

“We are very concerned by these findings and it shows the urgent need for more research to help identify early in life those that are most at risk of early adulthood mortality,” said Ms Westlund.

“It’s also absolutely critical that teenagers leaving the care of child health professionals and moving into the adult health care system are supported to continue to receive the best care possible throughout this tumultuous time.”

One of the world’s largest health-related congresses, the World Diabetes Congress is on at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from December 2 to 6.

The DRFWA, based at Royal Perth Hospital, is the State’s longest running diabetes research funding group, having been established in 1976 to stimulate research into diabetes in Western Australia, has now raised and distributed more than \$4.6 million dollars for this work. The DRFWA continues to fund research into all aspects of diabetes including the many complications that can develop from diabetes and programs addressing the need to further understand the psychological impact of living with diabetes, particularly for children and adolescents. For information about DRFWA, please visit www.diabetesresearchfoundation.asn.au or call (08) 9224 1006.

Media Contacts:

DRFWA: Natalie Caudle / natalie@capturemedia.com.au / 0407 984 435

ICHR: Carole Kerr, ckerr@ichr.uwa.edu.au, or (08) 9489 7966 / Tammy Gibbs, tgibbs@ichr.uwa.edu.au, (08) 9489 7963.