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Media Statement

NEW WA RESEARCH: BRAIN SCANS MAY PREDICT DEMENTIA IN TYPE 2 DIABETES

Ahead of National Diabetes Week (July 12-18), WA researchers have revealed MRI brain scans may be able to help predict which people with type 2 diabetes are more at risk of developing dementia.

The study, funded by a Diabetes Research WA top-up scholarship, found that slowed thinking skills and abnormalities in an area of the brain linked to memory and learning could provide early warning signs of dementia.

“Participants who displayed a decline in dementia status at the 18-month mark of the study – almost 1 in 10 people – were more likely to have a left hippocampus that was larger than the right in MRI scans taken at the start of the research,” said Nicole Milne, a University of Western Australia School of Psychology PhD student.

The findings follow those made in the first phase of the study that showed type 2 diabetes could dramatically affect the everyday thinking skills of up to one-in-three adults aged 60 and older.

“Brain-related changes are one of the lesser known complications of type 2 diabetes and can lead to cognitive problems such as memory difficulties, poor attention, and slower speed of thought,” she said.

“While the final, three year follow-up data are currently being analysed, it’s hoped the new knowledge already uncovered from this research may lead to ways to lessen the impact type 2 diabetes can have on memory and thinking skills.”

Diabetes Research WA executive director Sherl Westlund said this study showed the potential for research to improve the every day lives of people with diabetes.

“Nicole’s fantastic research opens up new possibilities for being able to prevent or delay dementia in people with type 2 diabetes and that would obviously make an incredible difference to them and their families,” she said.

The research uses data collected over a three-year period from participants taking part in the NHMRC-funded CANDID Study. It is supervised by Professor Romola Bucks, UWA School of Psychology, and Winthrop Professor David Bruce, UWA School of Medicine and Pharmacology.

The total number of Australians with diabetes and pre-diabetes is estimated at 3.2 million and type 2 diabetes accounts for up to 9 out of 10 cases of diabetes. 280 Australians develop diabetes every day, meaning more than 100,000 Australians have developed it in the past year.

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