



Embargoed until 12noon WST, Monday December 2, 2013

Media Statement

WA STUDY FINDS 1-IN-3 OLDER ADULTS WITH DIABETES HAVE IMPAIRED THINKING SKILLS

WA research to be revealed at the World Diabetes Congress in Melbourne next week has revealed type 2 diabetes can dramatically affect the everyday thinking skills of up to 1 in 3 of those aged over 60.

UWA researcher Nicole Milne said baseline results from the study, funded by the Diabetes Research Foundation of WA (DRFWA), showed people over 60 with the condition experienced comprised performance across a range of thinking skills.

“Participants in the study were slower to process information during timed tasks that measured their attention and memory ability, compared to other people of the same age,” she said.

“Significantly slower thinking skills – at a level that would affect day-to-day functioning – were also observed in 32 percent of those in the study when they were detecting a target and 1 in 4 participants during memory tasks.

“In comparison, only 7 percent of the general population are likely to complete these tasks at a similarly slowed pace so the impact of type 2 diabetes in this area is sizeable.”

Ms Milne said the results also revealed the mental flexibility and higher level thinking skills of study participants were lower than expected for their age group.

DRFWA executive director Sherl Westlund said the findings could have widespread implications for helping people with type 2 diabetes stay mentally fit and urged the community to get behind the Foundation in its financial support of early, cutting-edge research.

“This study also revealed those participants with a greater brain volume performed significantly better in memory accuracy and processing speed, so the next step is figuring out how to harness that information to reduce the impact of type 2 diabetes on thinking skills,” she said.

“It’s very important work that we are proud to have been able to support thanks to generous donations from the community; we are excited about what’s been discovered so far and the potential of what is to come.”

Ms Milne is the recipient of the Alex Cohen Diabetes Top Up Scholarship and an Australian Postgraduate Award, and is a PhD candidate at UWA.

-BACKGROUND FOLLOWS-

Media Contact:

Natalie Caudle, natalie@capturemedia.com.au, 0407 984 435

Background

Changes to the structure and function of the brain are lesser-known complications of type 2 diabetes.

The mechanisms behind these complications are not well-understood, and may be related to diabetes-specific factors such as raised glucose levels or the additive effect of co-morbid conditions, including hypertension and obesity.

This research, from the NHMRC-funded CANDID Study, involved 132 participants aged over 60. They were recruited from Phases 1 and 2 of the Fremantle Diabetes Study. All participants were free of dementia at the time of recruitment.

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.

-ENDS-

Media Contact:

Natalie Caudle, natalie@capturemedia.com.au, 0407 984 435