

media release



HMRI @ John Hunter Hospital and the University of Newcastle

Thursday 7th June 2007

Story opportunity – Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable disease that attacks the central nervous system. MS affects approximately 15,000 mainly young female Australians.

The cause of MS is unknown and it is thought to be a result of an interaction between environmental and hereditary factors. To date, no cure for MS has been found but the most effective treatment can reduce the relapse rate by 30 per cent, and slow the progression of disability.

Through the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI), researchers from John Hunter Hospital and the University of Newcastle are investigating the causes and development of MS in attempt to find clues that could lead to improved treatments.

Dr Jeannette Lechner-Scott, a John Hunter Hospital Staff Specialist and a Conjoint Lecturer at the University of Newcastle, is leading a Hunter study investigating the immunogenetic profile of MS to establish the genetic basis of the disease and how the immune system responds. Researchers aim to find clues that might predict the development of the disease and lead to better treatment.

Members of the community without MS are assisting this important area of research by participating in Dr Lechner-Scott's study, which involves completing a questionnaire and having a blood test. Since June 2006, 100 members of the community have volunteered to participate. Researchers hope to find another 200 participants who do not have MS.

“By examining patients and comparing them to healthy controls we will be able to determine what role genetic and environmental factors play in the disease process and offer insights into possible avenues of intervention to reduce disability from this devastating disease,” said Dr Lechner-Scott.

For more information about participating in the study phone Trish D'Accione, Coordinator of the HMRI Research Register, on 4985 5333.

Dr Jeannette Lechner-Scott is available for interview.

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