

MEDIA RELEASE

Reducing the cost of sleep disorders

Griffith University has been working with Queensland Health and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) to reduce the cost of sleep disorders.

Griffith Senior Lecturer in Management Dr Don Kerr said the direct cost of sleep disorders on the Australian health system was estimated at \$40 million per year.

"In addition to direct costs, sleep disorders are also costing the nation a lot of money indirectly, through road accidents and accidents at work," Dr Kerr said.

"Often general practitioners do not have enough information or are not well equipped to deal with the diagnosis of sleep disorders, so they err on the side of caution and refer patients to sleep centres.

"Health departments spend nearly \$300 per night at sleep centres diagnosing patients, which is a costly exercise and ties up valuable resources – particularly as many of these referrals are unnecessary."

Dr Kerr said his team was working on a project to develop a more effective system of diagnosing sleep disorders.

"The project is investigating and developing a web-based intelligent decision support system to provide a cost effective solution to this problem," Dr Kerr said.

"The software is designed to more accurately diagnose a sleep problem and help determine if a night at the sleep centre is needed. Sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnoea, periodic limb movement disorder and associated conditions will be identified by the software.

"The software will enable patients to enter their information at home, allowing specialists to conduct a preliminary diagnosis and develop a database for follow up consultations."

Hospitals and sleep centres will be equipped with the software for people without access to the internet at home.

Dr Kerr said the benefits would include a reduction in the costs incurred in travel, time off work and time at hospital sleep care centres for people in remote areas.

Other project team members include Griffith Head of Management Dr Louis Sanzogni and PhD student Jacqueline Blake, along with Associate Professor Raj Gururajan from USQ and colleagues from the Prince Charles Sleep Centre, the Toowoomba Health Service District and Columbus University in the United States.

The project has been jointly funded by the Australian Research Council, Griffith, USQ, The Australian Messaging Health Care Laboratory and Queensland Health.

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