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Interim research results provide hope for 50,000 Australians who have a stroke each year

Every year 50,000 Australians will have a stroke. This number is estimated to increase to over 74,000 a year by the year 2017 as the population ages. With each stroke the outcome is bleak for the majority with: 1/3 dying within 12 months; 1/3 being disabled; and only 1/3 regaining a quality life after stroke.

A trial that is currently being conducted around the world, including at hospitals in Australia, offers hope to people who have a stroke. The interim results of the SAINT I trial are showing that the administration of the drug NXY-059 within six hours of a person having a stroke significantly reduces disability. Additional research is being conducted, however the interim results are positive.

"Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability in Australia. One of the reasons for this is the length of time between a stroke commencing and the patient presenting to hospital. The longer the delay the increased chances of brain damage. This is an important trial as the current window of opportunity for treatment to save brain is 3 hours. The results of the trial indicate that treatment out to 6 hours may be possible and this represents great hope for people that have a stroke." says Professor Chris Bladin, joint Medical Director for the National Stroke Foundation.

"Stroke is a leading cause of disease burden and anything that can reduce disability and improve life after stroke is very positive news," states Dr Erin Lalor, CEO of the National Stroke Foundation.

"Whilst these results are promising, with the final results to be known in the first half of 2007, these interim results support the need for people to be aware of the signs of stroke and seek immediate medical attention if they think they are having a stroke. There is currently a low awareness of the signs of stroke. If people don't know that they are having a stroke they won't know that they have to seek medical attention as an emergency." Dr Erin Lalor concluded.

Stroke should always be treated as a medical emergency. As many stroke survivors can tell you, there are often early signs of stroke. The signs of both stroke and TIA may be any one, or combination of the following:

- **Weakness or numbness** or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body
- **Difficulty speaking** or understanding
- **Dizziness**, loss of balance or an unexplained fall
- **Loss of vision**, sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- **Headache**, usually severe and of abrupt onset or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches
- **Difficulty swallowing**

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About stroke in Australia

Stroke is the third largest cause of death and one of the leading causes of disability amongst adults in Australia. Over 50,000 strokes occur in Australia every year with a stroke occurring every 11 minutes. Approximately 220,000 Australians who have suffered a stroke are living in the community. Whilst stroke is more common amongst the elderly, it is not isolated to this age bracket. Over 50% of strokes are under the age of 75 years with around 5% of strokes under the age of 45 years. Importantly stroke can be treated and is preventable. The National Stroke Foundation is the leading organisation responsible for stroke in Australia.

Available for interview

Professor Chris Bladin and Dr Chris Levi, joint Medical Directors of the National Stroke Foundation and Dr Erin Lalor, CEO of the National Stroke Foundation.

Contact Jo Burrows on 0411 730 138 to arrange an interview.

www.strokefoundation.com.au