



Rheumatology

2012 RESEARCH REPORT

RHEUMATOLOGY

➔ HEAD OF UNIT: DR CHRISTOPHER FONG

Rheumatology is one of the smallest medical specialities within Eastern Health. This unit is actively collaborating with a variety of other specialities including dermatology, gastroenterology, geriatrics, orthopaedics and internal medicine within Eastern Health.

INVESTIGATIONS IN PROGRESS

Investigations successfully progressing across the year have included:

A phase III, multicentre, randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, parallel-group, efficacy and safety study of two doses of apremilast in subjects with active psoriatic arthritis and are currently on 20 mgs methotrexate weekly

Lead investigator: **Fong C.** This is a sponsored pharmaceutical study in patients with psoriatic arthritis who are not responding to conventional therapy and are currently treated with 20mgs methotrexate. Currently there are few therapies effective in treating psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis which can be a disabling disease affecting the patient's quality of life. Patients are given a new cytokine modulator to assess its effectiveness to treat their psoriatic arthritis. The study commenced in April 2011 and currently has screened seven patients with three patients compliant and remaining on the study treatment. Enrolment was completed in September 2011 and the patients will continue in the treatment phase of the study for a further three years.

A Phase III, multicentre, randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, parallel-group, efficacy and safety study of two doses of apremilast in subjects with active psoriatic arthritis and who are methotrexate naïve.

Lead investigator: **Fong C.** This is a sponsored pharmaceutical study in patients with psoriatic arthritis who are not responding to conventional therapy and are methotrexate naïve. Currently there are few therapies effective in treating psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis which can be a disabling disease affecting the patient's quality of life. Patients are given a new cytokine modulator to assess its effectiveness to treat their psoriatic arthritis. The study commenced May 2012 and has six patients screened and six patients randomised to study treatment. Enrolment was completed by July 2012 and the patients will continue in the study treatment phase for two years.

Is low dose amitriptyline more effective than placebo in the management of chronic, neuropathic low back pain?

Lead investigator: **Fong C.** (Monash University) Urquhart D, Cicuttini F,

Wluka A. A double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trial with an economic evaluation. Chronic low back pain (LBP) is a major public health problem. Although antidepressants are commonly used to treat pain in this condition, their efficacy is unproven. Of note, our Cochrane systematic reviews concluded that there is no clear evidence that antidepressants are effective for LBP. This is an NHMRC-funded study in collaboration with the Musculoskeletal Unit at Monash University and Alfred Health. The project will recruit 150 subjects across the two sites (Eastern Health and Alfred Health) with chronic LBP. Participants will receive low-dose amitriptyline or an active placebo for six months. Pain, function and absence from work will be assessed at baseline, three and six months using valid instruments. Our economic evaluation will determine and compare all back pain-related costs of patients receiving antidepressants and placebo. The study is currently in the set up phase at Eastern Health.

The Department of Rheumatology has four psoriatic arthritis studies pending.



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Accessing program reports

Eastern Health is committed to building a culture of research and ensuring such research is embedded in everyday clinical practice. Eastern Health contributes to local, national and international research activity.

The *2012 Eastern Health Research Report* forms part of the broader fifth annual *Eastern Health Research Report* reflecting the high-calibre research, commitment and strength of research programs across Eastern Health. The complete *2012 Eastern Health Research Report* including clinical program reports is available in hard copy by contacting The Office of Research & Ethics on 9895 9551 or via download from www.easternhealth.org.au

Readers note: Where projects are collaborative with our respective research partners, Eastern Health staff names are in bold.

Clinical program reports available include (list not exhaustive):

- Eastern Health Clinical School
- Medical student programs
- Research division
- Eastern Clinical Research Unit (ECRU)
- Eastern Clinical Research Unit – Translational Division (ECRU-TRD)
- Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre
- Allied Health
- Breast oncology
- Cardiology
- Emergency medicine
- Endocrinology
- Haematology
- Integrated renal and obstetric medicine services
- Intensive care medicine
- Mental health programs
- Neuroscience
- Nursing and midwifery
- Palliative Medicine
- Pharmacy
- Post Graduate Education Unit
- Respiratory and sleep medicine
- Rehabilitation programs
- Rheumatology