

8 February 2019

New Institute for Musculoskeletal Health launches in Sydney

A research collaboration dedicated to improving the lives of patients with musculoskeletal conditions and promoting physical activity for older people and those with a disability has been launched in Sydney.

The Institute for Musculoskeletal Health brings together leading researchers and clinicians from Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney to develop innovative solutions to combat the growing burden of musculoskeletal disease and physical inactivity in Australia and around the world.

Poor musculoskeletal health is the most common reason for Australians to access healthcare services, costing the economy more than \$55 billion in direct health costs, loss of productivity and burden of disease.

This burden will increase in coming decades with an ageing population. By 2023, it is estimated the number of cases will increase by 43 per cent to 8.7 million Australians – or more than 30 per cent of the population.

There are more than 150 forms of musculoskeletal conditions, including back pain and back problems, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis and juvenile arthritis.

Sydney Local Health District Chief Executive Dr Teresa Anderson AM said the Institute formalises the longstanding relationship between healthcare researchers and front line clinicians, which has produced world-leading research, including a 2018 series in *The Lancet*.

This collaboration revealed a global epidemic of inappropriate tests and treatments for back pain, such as imaging, opioids and surgery, highlighting the extent to which musculoskeletal conditions are mistreated, often against best practice treatment guidelines.

“Our partnership provides a platform to strengthen clinician-researcher alliances and improve the translation of research into the community,” Dr Anderson said.

The University of Sydney’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Duncan Ivison said the Institute has secured \$32 million in National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding and appointed more than 110 staff and affiliates.

“We are committed to developing the innovative solutions required to reduce the growing burden of musculoskeletal disease and physical inactivity in Australia and around the world,” he said.

The Institute is led by recognised world leaders in musculoskeletal health, with the executive team comprising Professors Chris Maher, Jane Latimer and Cathie Sherrington from the University of Sydney’s School of Public Health and Dr Bethan Richards, Head of the Department of Rheumatology at RPA.

The Institute’s team of researchers and clinicians come from a variety of backgrounds including medicine, allied health, nursing and pharmacy and health promotion, and all bring extensive experience in planning, designing and conducting clinical trials.

Currently, the Institute is investigating where taking a short course of oxycodone reduces pain severity in acute back or neck pain compared to placebo (the OPAL trial).

In 2018, the PRECISE trial examined the efficacy and safety of pregabalin in sciatica and provided unequivocal evidence against its use. The trial was a finalist for Trial of the Year by the Australian Clinical Trials Alliance and the results were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The official launch of the Institute took place on February 8, 2019 at the Kerry Packer Education Centre at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Professor Rachelle Buchbinder, Chair of the Australia and New Zealand Musculoskeletal Clinical Trial Network, and a member of the Institute's Advisory Board, delivered the inaugural Musculoskeletal Health Oration.

For more information see www.imh.org.au or contact Hanan McLachlan by email hanan.mclachlan@sydney.edu.au

Media

Sydney Local Health District: Louise Hall 0475 972 895

University of Sydney: Kobi Print 0481 012 729