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RESEARCH ALLIANCE

Adding Muscle to Geriatric Rehab

What is the problem?

The worldwide population is ageing; it is expected that the proportion of people aged 60 years and above will triple over the next 30 years. The longer we live, the more age related diseases we get. Sarcopenia – low muscle mass – is a significant problem for us as we age. It is not often diagnosed and can cause serious falls, morbidity and even death. In geriatric patients some 30-40% are affected – a major burden on the health system.

About this research translation project

The goal of the project is to counteract sarcopenia in geriatric patients. The Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) has enrolled 790 patients and is actively following patients up to 12 months post-discharge to assess patient health, including patient's level of independence, mobility, rates of admission to hospital and overall survival. The study has already determined that 42% of these patients have sarcopenia and that a person's lean muscle mass was reduced by about 700g within just 3 weeks of admission to hospital – meaning hospitalisation made the problem worse. This is likely due to a lack of knowledge about sarcopenia among Australian and New Zealand healthcare professionals, lack of diagnostic tools and treatment protocols.

The project will gather evidence on the prevalence of sarcopenia from multiple geriatric rehabilitation units across three health services. In addition, a biobank of blood and muscle/skin samples is being established to help researchers understand loss of muscle mass and help develop interventions.

What will be the impact?

The program will deliver a network of cooperating wards, initially statewide, to more effectively address the problem of sarcopenia in patients. An evidence based understanding of the benefits of exercise and nutritional supplementation during hospital will also be developed. Importantly the program will also provide continuous educational programs for healthcare professionals (SarcopeniaRoadShow) and general population – optimising our ability to treat sarcopenia.



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