



# Media release

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Amphetamine study**

Australia's first study into the burden of amphetamines on Emergency Departments has shown that the drug is having a major impact on Hospitals, and a major impact on users' health.

A three-month study by academic Emergency Department (ED) physicians at Royal Perth Hospital has shown that more than 600 people a year are presenting to the Hospital with problems arising from amphetamine use.

Chief investigator Dr Suzanne Gray will present the findings at the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine and UWA joint State meeting, to be held in Busselton this weekend.

Dr Gray said that during the study, 37 per cent of the people presenting to the ED after amphetamine use required psychiatric intervention.

Forty per cent had to be admitted to the Hospital – which has a significant impact on bed availability.

Dr Gray said 46 per cent of the patients had previous amphetamine-related presentations to the ED.

The study showed that a significant number of the people presenting to the ED (71 per cent) were intravenous users, with 57 per cent using more than once a week.

“This has revealed that these people are experienced, frequent users of amphetamines,” Dr Gray said.

She said about half these people were aged between 20 and 30 years (51 per cent), but they also saw an alarming number of people aged over 30 (about 30 per cent) and even people aged into their 50s.

The youngest patient during the study was 16 years old.

The research was conducted by Dr Gray, with clinical toxicologists doctors Frank Daly and David McCoubrie and Associate Professor Daniel Fatovich.

Dr Fatovich said that while WA had dealt well with issues around cigarette smoking, amphetamine use was still a significant public health issue.

“In 20 years we will look back on amphetamines as the “smoking epidemic” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” he said.

“Any use of these drugs needs to be seen as unacceptable.

“It is really bad for you – and not just for the day you take it, but for the rest of your life.”

He said even people who considered themselves “recreational” users of amphetamines such as ecstasy were at risk of developing psychiatric illness such as depression, a personality disorder or schizophrenia.

A significant proportion of people presenting to the ED were suffering the effects of acute amphetamine intoxication, which included severe agitated delirium, aggression and antisocial behaviour and acute psychosis.

“A large number of people in our mental health system have used amphetamines,” he said.

“And what users have to remember is that if you damage your brain with these drugs, there is no cure.”

Studies have reported definite brain damage from regular use of amphetamines, including ecstasy, resulting in impairment of learning and memory.

Dr Daly, who is Head of the RPH Emergency Department, said this disturbing research had one bright side.

“Patients presenting to an emergency department with drug and alcohol problems have an opportunity to get help and change their behaviour for the better, and hopefully prevent the long-term harm,” he said.

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