

Media Statement

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MEDIA RELEASE

RPH Emergency Department tests marathon runners for heart enzyme

Royal Perth Hospital researchers hope to test runners in next week's Perth Marathon for a natural chemical that usually diagnoses a heart attack.

The researchers hope to get a blood sample of the participants before and after the July 8 race to look for raised levels of troponin – a natural chemical that usually signifies to doctors that some heart muscle has died.

Usually, high troponin levels show that a significant amount of tissue has just died and the person has had a heart attack.

RPH Emergency Department researcher A/Prof Daniel Fatovich said that a recently published study showed that two thirds of runners tested after the Boston Marathon had raised troponin levels.

"We expect to find the same results as Boston – but we also hope to work out why this happens," he said.

He said he did not think marathon runners were at a great risk of heart attack.

"People always have a small amount of troponin in their blood, from the normal life cycle of cells, but we think that during strenuous exercise, people's kidneys haven't caught up with the extra action of their body and so the concentration is raised," he said.

Dr Fatovich and his team will be at the race area at the WA Marathon Club rooms at Burswood before and after the race, where he hopes to collect small blood samples from at least 50 of the expected 250 participants.

He said that about half the participants would be first-time marathon runners, and troponin levels tended to rise more in people whose bodies were not used to the strain of such a long event.

WA Marathon Club spokesman Evan Kolbe said marathon runners were by definition very fit and healthy and he expected many runners would want to find out how their bodies reacted to the event.

“There is no evidence to suggest that runners have a higher incidence of heart attack, and so we are hoping that the findings from this study will eliminate any rumours of this,” he said.