

## **Under the Microscope**

### **With Prof Watts and Dr Chan**

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People with a pot-belly are invited to volunteer for a study which will investigate the effects of weight loss and a new cholesterol lowering drug on fat metabolism in the body.

The RPH study received \$493, 000 from the National Health and Medical Research Council and will look into how a cholesterol-inhibiting drug together with weight loss can treat blood fat disorders in obese or overweight people.

Head of Internal Medicine and the Lipid Disorders Clinic, Professor Gerald Watts, said he hopes to understand how the combination of the drug Ezetemibe and weight loss through dieting can benefit people with a high-risk form of obesity, known as 'the metabolic syndrome'.

“People with metabolic syndrome have abdominal obesity, abnormal blood fat levels, elevated blood pressure and an increased risk of heart disease and diabetes, “ he said.

Treatment of the abnormal fat levels is important to reduce the incidence and severity of heart disease.

Ezetemibe is a new and safe drug that is used to reduce cholesterol absorption from the gut and lower blood fat levels. How it works particularly when combined with weight loss is unknown.

“We want to see how this drug affects the movement of fat particles in the blood in people who have lost weight and hence to ascertain whether it can confer additional health benefits to weight loss.

“By understanding how this drug works in the blood we can further understand its benefits on overweight/obese people at high risk of heart disease and provide a more rational approach to weight management.”

Several tests such as a physical examination, blood test and electrocardiogram are conducted to determine a person's eligibility for the study.

The study involves a multi disciplinary team consisting of laboratory scientists, biomathematicians, nurses, clinicians and dieticians.

The NHMRC grant will allow the team to use sophisticated technology, known as tracer methodology, to follow the movement of fat particles in the blood.

Participants will be injected with a harmless tracer which can be used to track the speed at which fat particles move out of the liver and are metabolised by the body. Changes in body fat compartments will be measured by special scanning equipment (MRI and MRS) in Imaging Services.

The other chief investigators are Prof Hugh Barrett, Dr Dick Chan and Dr Seng Khee Gan.



People who are overweight with a high level of liver and/or abdominal fat and are interested in taking part in this study can call 9224 0317.