

## **Barker Scholars aims to improve quality of life for stroke survivors**

### **Jennifer White**

Trying to improve the quality of life of stroke sufferers is the aim of a new study, by PhD student Jennifer White. Jennifer has been awarded the Barker Scholarship through the University of Newcastle Foundation. Jennifer is the ninth Barker Scholar.

The scholarship is funded by the Barker family, who have made a generous donation to the University of Newcastle Foundation to create the Barker Family PhD Fund.

Don and Annette Barker set up the fund in 2001 to assist scholars researching in the fields of stroke, prostate cancer, melanoma or ageing well. The Barkers anticipate that the diligent efforts of their scholars will benefit not only the Newcastle community, but will also obtain international recognition.

Jennifer is undertaking a pilot study called 'exploring the real-life experience of mood disturbance in community dwelling stroke survivors: a longitudinal study.' As part of the study 100 stroke survivors will be recruited. They will be followed for the first year after their stroke with the aim of developing an intervention that can be implemented nationally to improve the healthcare of stroke survivors.

Most stroke survivors return home to live and experience ongoing disability. At least one quarter of stroke survivors experience altered moods or depression. Post stroke depression can be very disabling and has been shown to reduce recovery and quality of life, but little is known about the extent of its impact.

Jennifer is aiming to find out more about the factors which are associated with mood disorder and depression in the months following stroke, in order to better manage this.

"Ignoring the problem means that many Australians will continue suffering more than necessary after their stroke."

Approximately 75 per cent of strokes occur in the over 65 age group. Interventions that help minimise the impact of stroke also helps this older age group to regain and maintain their desired lifestyle. This can improve quality of life and improve life expectancy.



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