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MEDIA STATEMENT

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\$5 MILLION TO STUDY ROLE OF EXERCISE IN SPINAL CORD REPAIR

Two Western Australian researchers were today awarded almost \$5 million over five years to study the effects of physical activity on spinal cord injury. Professor Sarah Dunlop is a Professorial Fellow at The University of Western Australia and Associate Professor Garry Allison is an Associate Professor of Neuroscience and Trauma Physiotherapy at Curtin University of Technology.

Part of a national team headed by Professor Mary Galea of the University of Melbourne, the team's research program is entitled "SCIPA, Spinal Cord Injury and Physical Activity: Promoting neural recovery following spinal cord injury through exercise" and is made up of four research projects.

Three clinical trials will examine the effectiveness of very early intervention in intensive care for lower limbs, followed by task-specific training for arms and hands, and an intensive activity-based therapy program for the whole body, including the paralysed limbs.

The fourth project, led by the WA members, will develop individualised gym programs that can be undertaken in the community after the injured person is discharged from hospital.

"The focus of the program will be on promoting neurological recovery, maintaining health and wellness, and optimising independence," Professor Dunlop said

"The program will help anyone with a spinal cord injury to increase their level of activity and participation by developing training programs for community fitness instructors," Associate Professor Allison said.

The clinical trials aim to use new rehabilitation strategies directed at neuromuscular activation below the level of the injury and will involve all seven spinal units in Australia and New Zealand. The WA unit is the Sir George Bedbrook Spinal Injuries Centre at Royal Perth Hospital's Shenton Park campus.

The grant, provided by the Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative (VNI), is part of more than \$19 million for research in brain and spinal cord injury. Every year, there are about 290 new cases of spinal cord injury in Australia and about 30,000 new traumatic brain injury hospital admissions. These injuries result in lifelong disability, often occurring between the ages of 15 and 40 and coinciding with important life events such as career development, establishing families, and completion of education and training.

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