



MEDIA RELEASE

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Healthy young diabetic dies in their sleep – why?

Australian researchers have taken an important first step in determining the cause of death for young people with type 1 diabetes who inexplicably die during their sleep. The progress will mean in the future, doctors may be able to answer the question - why did my loved one die?

Publishing this week in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Associate Professor Chris Semsarian, head of the Centenary Institute's Molecular Cardiology laboratory, said there are a small number of young Australians suffering type 1 diabetes who die suddenly from *dead in bed syndrome*.

"It is not a common syndrome but it is heartbreaking for the families. Their son or daughter with diabetes goes to bed healthy and dies overnight without explanation," Associate Professor Semsarian explains. "The syndrome is not necessarily new, but it is poorly understood. We don't know what causes it or who is at risk."

Associate Professor Semsarian and his colleagues decided to review NSW autopsy records of people known to have had diabetes that had died suddenly, and to investigate the circumstances of death.

"People without diabetes who have heart rhythm problems have an elongation of the QT interval which can lead to sudden death. Some people with diabetes have this same QT interval problem. The hypothesis being there may be an underlying genetic fault in these people that leads to their sudden and unexplained death."

With the QT interval as the common link and looking at the autopsy records, the researchers have determined there is definitely a problem which warrants further investigation.

"This study has highlighted that a small number of people with type 1 diabetes do suffer from *dead in bed syndrome*. Our team are now performing DNA analysis studies and we hope to find out if there are faults in heart genes contributing to these deaths," Associate Professor Semsarian says. "This is just the start of the research in this area. There are currently no publications of gene studies of sudden death in type 1 diabetes, so our team is focused on finding answers for the families of these patients."

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Notes to Editor:**About the Centenary Institute**

The Centenary Institute, located on the grounds of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, is a centre of excellence in medical research with a portfolio of projects in cancer, immunology and molecular medicine. The Centenary Institute's strategy is to undertake cutting edge research into the biology of normal and diseased cells, with the goal of improving our understanding of what causes disease and to translate these discoveries into clinical practice through the development of new vaccines, better diagnostic tests and innovative forms of treatment. For further information about the Centenary Institute, visit www.centenary.org.au.