

The Women's Health Program undertakes research and provides education about common health issues that affect women throughout adult life and the impact of menopause and role of sex hormones (estrogen and testosterone) on health and wellbeing. The research program includes studies addressing the effects of menopause; prevention of diabetes, dementia, breast cancer and urinary incontinence (UI); and improving wellbeing, sexual function and optimising quality of life after breast cancer.

Major Research Findings

- Developed and published a new tool (PROSPECT) for GPs to identify women aged 70 and above who are most likely to need treatment to prevent fracture if radiological imaging is undertaken. This will enable more targeted screening in the community.
- From a longitudinal study, we reported that UI has a dynamic time-course with relatively high incidence and resolution rates, but with an overall trend of increasing prevalence with age. There were few women with UI receiving treatment with proven efficacy, suggesting significant barriers.
- We reported on the relationship between hormone therapy use at the time of diagnosis of breast cancer and tumor characteristics. Importantly, our data shows that Australian women who were taking HRT at the time their breast cancer was diagnosed did not have more advanced disease.
- We investigated the use of complementary and alternative therapy (CAM) amongst women with breast cancer and found the frequency of use of CAMs in common usage for menopausal symptoms by women with breast cancer was lower than anticipated, increased with time from diagnosis and is associated with more severe menopausal symptoms.

Research Achievements

- NHMRC Project Grant: Selective estrogen receptor modulators (SERMs) – a potential new treatment for child bearing age women with schizophrenia (J Kulkarni, S Davis): \$205,016
- NHMRC Project Grant: Transdermal testosterone therapy: a potential treatment for selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI)-associated sexual dysfunction in women (S Davis, R Bell, J Kulkarni): \$235,295
- Victorian Cancer Agency Fellowship (R Bell)

Screening Tool for Osteoporosis

Although bone density by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) is the standard measure for the diagnosis of osteoporosis, as a screening tool it has significant cost and is not universally available. PROSPECT (Prospective Screening for Osteoporosis; Australian Primary Care Evaluation of Clinical Tests) was a national study undertaken to develop an effective pre-screening tool to be used in primary care to facilitate targeted assessment of women aged 70 years and over for prevention of osteoporotic fractures. This study was undertaken in conjunction with the Monash University School of Primary Health Care and Servier Laboratories. The resultant decision support tool for osteoporosis screening will be introduced to GPs across Australia throughout 2011 and can be accessed via the Women's Health website. The tool assists health care practitioners

in evaluating which of their female patients aged 70 and over need a bone density test and a plain X-ray. The tool uses three clinical risk factors: body mass index, rib-pelvis distance and use of estrogen.

Current Projects

- Waistline study: metformin for the management of insulin resistance in overweight women at midlife (S Davis, R Bell, F Jane)
- ATLAS: Adjuvant Tamoxifen Longer Against Shorter (S Davis)
- Assessment of knee joint articular cartilage volume change in women with breast cancer treated with anastrozole or letrozole and comparison with untreated controls (S Davis, R Bell)
- The effect of transdermal testosterone gel 300mcg daily on cognitive performance in older postmenopausal women: a randomised placebo controlled trial (S Davis, R Bell, F Jane)
- BUPA Health Foundation Health and Wellbeing after Breast Cancer Study (S Davis, R Bell)
- The effect of transdermal testosterone patch (Intrinsa®) on cognitive performance in older postmenopausal women: a randomised placebo controlled trial (S Davis, S Davison)
- Effects of metformin on the LKB1/AMPK pathway in breast tissue, a randomised clinical trial (S Davis, E Simpson, K Brown, R Bell)
- A randomised double-blind placebo-controlled trial to assess the effects of 17 beta-oestradiol 1mg + drospirenone 2mg administration on cognitive function in early postmenopausal women (S Davis, F Jane, R Bell)
- Multicentre, double-blind, randomised study to investigate the impact of a sequential oral contraceptive containing estradiol valerate and dienogest (SH T00658ID) compared to a monophasic contraceptive containing ethinylestradiol and levonorgestrel (Microgynon) over 6 treatment cycles on alleviating complaints of reduced libido in women with acquired female sexual dysfunction associated with oral contraceptive use (S Davis, F Jane)
- Transdermal testosterone therapy: a potential treatment for SSRI-associated sexual dysfunction in women (S Davis, R Bell)

Professor Susan Davis (left) and Associate Professor Robin Bell, Director and Deputy Director of the Women's Health Program, Monash University.



Postgraduate Students

3 PhD Students

Publications

13 Journal Articles

1 Book Chapter