



30 June 2021

Ground-breaking trial expanded to assess chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) among Māori

The country's first-ever national lung cancer screening trial will be expanded to include a study of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) among Māori.

The trial, which could potentially lead to earlier diagnosis of the disease and better outcomes for patients, is being led by Waitematā DHB, Auckland DHB and University of Otago following [approval of a \\$1.96 million grant from the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases \(GACD\)](#) - via the Health Research Council in May.

Today, all three welcomed a second grant of nearly \$1.2 million from the from the Health Research Council's Rangahau Hauora Māori investment stream that will expand the trial to include a closer-than-ever-before look at COPD – a preventable and treatable respiratory condition that ranks among the top five leading causes of death across the globe.

COPD is a smoking-related condition that is more common among Māori - occurring at a younger age than it does in other ethnic groups. Māori also have much higher rates of hospitalisation for COPD-related illness.

“The impact of COPD among Māori is disproportionate to the rest of the population,” University of Otago Professor and study lead Dr Sue Crengle (Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, Kāi Tahu) says. “The disease is known to be underdiagnosed in primary care and there may be under-treatment of diagnosed COPD.

“Early diagnosis is vital to the effective management of this disease – which includes medications, pulmonary rehabilitation programmes and support for smoking cessation. This study will help us better-understand the prevalence and severity of COPD among people who undergo lung cancer screening. It will focus on getting people diagnosed and treated sooner to reduce the impact COPD has on the lives of patients and their whānau.”

Up to 500 people at high-risk of lung cancer are taking part in the screening trial, which uses low-dose CT scans to detect any abnormalities. Those who consent will be assessed for COPD by blowing into a spirometer device to test their lung capacity, questionnaires and CT scan results.

Waitematā DHB and Auckland DHB Director of Health Outcomes Dr Karen Bartholomew says study findings will be shared with participating GPs and clinics, with potential to reshape the way COPD is managed.

“In the study, we will look at whether COPD assessment of this kind will help optimise the kind of management that is required to reduce the disease's progression and improve health and quality-of-life. That, in turn, will help decide if and how it should be included as part of any future lung cancer screening programme in the longer term. We have a track record of including screening or assessment for several treatable conditions in one visit. This makes the process a little easier for people and we believe it is the way of the future for screening programmes.”

Ends.

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