Australasian Kidney Trials Network

The Australasian Kidney Trials Network (AKTN) is a resource which is inclusive of all researchers in the area kidney disease within Australia and New Zealand. This network was established to foster investigator initiated trials in renal disease examining the efficacy and safety of technologies, such as drug, or non-drug therapies and diagnostic or screening tools, and in particular to engage and enhance opportunities to improve technology.

Prior to the establishment of the AKTN, there was no formalised renal trials' network operating within Australia. In October 2003, a proposal led by Dr Carmel Hawley, in response to a request by the ANZSN and KHA for expressions of interest to run such a clinical trials network, was developed and submitted. In August 2004, ANZSN and KHA endorsed this proposal to pursue the initiation and running of the Australasian Kidney Trial Network involving a Brisbane-based Operations Secretariat with a successful NMRC Enabling Grant awarded to the network. The group was supported in early stages by staff from the Princess Alexandra Hospital Centres for Health Research, Professor Don Cameron AO, Chair and Ms Areti Gavrilidis, Director Research Development and Ethics.

Research infrastructure has been established to effectively connect Australian and New Zealand researchers and the practising nephrology community. The AKTN brings together critical mass of expertise in trial design, obtaining research funding, electronic data capture, data management, trial conduct, analysis and reporting. The membership of the network is diverse and includes physicians, epidemiologists, biostatisticians, nurses, allied health professionals and scientists involved in clinical and translational renal research

Key achievements of the network include the establishment of a vibrant clinical and translational research network and infrastructure that fosters collaborations between clinical research investigators in Australia and New Zealand. Other achievements include:

- Success with competitive funding particular from Commonwealth funding opportunities and international competitive grants.
- Bilateral links with national organisations including the Queensland State Government, Queensland Clinical Trials Network, Australia and New Zealand Society of Nephrology, Kidney Health Australia, ANZDATA Registry, CARI Guidelines, and Cochrane Renal Group to ensure consensus in targeted research strategies
- Clinical trial initiation and development with a robust process for the development of trial concepts into high quality clinical trials
- The development of proposals for clinical trials with over 30 trials proposed to date
- Successful patient recruitment (strategies have included extending invitations to participate in the trials to all nephrology centres in Australia and New Zealand thus establishing a link between practising nephrologists and researchers)
- Focusing on patient-centred outcomes in priority areas through an established rigorous peer-review

process of assessing all clinical trial proposals.

- Strategy to successfully train, educate and mentor the next generation of clinician researchers. Leading nephrologists provide key leadership to enhance the clinical research capacity and expand the critical mass of senior clinician mentors for junior clinician researchers.

The network has been actively involved in discussions with clinician researchers in Malaysia, China, United Kingdom and Canada around collaborations in clinical trials. The vision is to continue to consolidate on current strengths and focus on key strategic scientific and operational goals. These include:

- Establishing of the AKTN as a key group in a Global Kidney Trials Consortium to not only engage Australasian colleagues in international projects, but to help Australasian researchers and their clinical and translational research gain international recognition.
- Consolidating AKTN's position as a national leader in renal research and broaden the range of trials performed and forge closer links with existing groups and infrastructure to maximise on collaborations and efficiency.
- Strengthening the Scientific Program and enable the development of new ideas, fill gaps in translational research and evidence in the practice of nephrology, widen focus of trials and to enhance links with existing organisations in conducting high priority studies for Indigenous communities throughout Australia Indigenous health.
- Developing early-career researchers by continuing to actively encourage and promote young researchers, provide scholarships for PhD programs and Masters Degree courses, and continue with educational workshops on clinical trials design, methods, analysis and conduct.

The group are currently running four trials, three of which are being run in Australasia and one trial involves Malaysia and the UK. Plans are underway to commence a further Australasian trial in November.

The AKTN is continuing to forge its position as a leader in clinical trials in nephrology. The next five years promise to strengthen and diversity the activities of AKTN and to deliver the results a number of trials which will improve the outcomes of patients with kidney disease.

Associate Professor Carmel Hawley
Chair, Operations Secretariat