

### Media statement

26 November 2019

#### **New study to focus on common liver disease**

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) affects up to 30 per cent of Australians and is becoming the most common cause of chronic liver disease in Australia.

NAFLD is caused by excess fat being stored in the liver and is common in people who are overweight and have diabetes. Whilst many patients with NAFLD have mild disease that can be managed by their GP, a proportion can develop progressive scarring of the liver that can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Senior Staff Specialist in Hepatology, Professor James O'Beirne, is proud to be a chief investigator for the \$1 million Australian Government LOCATE research trial that aims to assess patients for severe liver disease at mobile clinics in regional centres.

Prof O'Beirne said: "The trial will evaluate a new model of care where specially trained nurses screen patients with abnormal liver function tests. This is done in the community using a non-invasive scanner to detect scarring of the liver without the need to be referred to hospital.

"Our new model of care aims to decrease waiting times for assessment, meaning that patients with mild NAFLD can be reassured and managed by their GP with lifestyle measures. Patients with severe disease will be identified and treated by a liver specialist more quickly.

"As there may be no obvious symptoms, NAFLD is often under-recognised by GPs. We hope the study will raise awareness of the condition and the importance of assessing the extent of liver scarring," Prof O'Beirne said.

Co-investigators include Professor Adrian Barnett (QUT), Dr Sanjeewa Kularatna (QUT), Dr David Brain (QUT), Dr Ingrid Hickman (University of Queensland), Professor Elizabeth Powell (University of Queensland) and Associate Professor Patricia Valery (QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute).

The LOCATE trial begins in mid-2020 and will focus on the Sunshine Coast and Metro South regions.

**ENDS**

# Sunshine Coast

## Hospital and Health Service

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Interviews with Prof. James O'Beirne available on request.

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