



MEDIA RELEASE

17 November 2004

\$2.2 million for study of very premature babies

Experts at Liverpool Hospital are participating in an Australia-wide trial to help premature babies have the very best chance of survival.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has awarded a grant of \$2.2 million for the study of how much oxygen very premature babies need.

Doctors and nurses who care for very premature babies face a dilemma. Too much or too little oxygen can permanently damage the eyes, lungs and brain.

Liverpool Hospital head of Neonatal Intensive Care Dr Robert Guaran said the study was a major investment which could improve the long term health of thousands of very premature babies not only in south-western Sydney but worldwide.

“Clinical trials like this one are crucial to keep improving the outlook for the smallest babies,” Dr Guaran said.

All 20 neonatal intensive care units in Australia will take part in this study, which aims to enroll 1200 babies born more than 12 weeks premature.

Although the side effects of too much or too little oxygen were discovered 50 years ago, no one has been able to determine what the safest level of oxygen is in the first few weeks after birth.

This national study aims to answer that question. Babies will be divided into two groups. One group will be given slightly less oxygen than the other. Both levels of oxygen are within the currently used range.

Blood oxygen will be measured every few seconds using a painless technique called pulse oximetry.

At two years of age, the babies will have a specialist examination to compare their health and developmental skills.

For inquiries contact South Western Sydney Area Health Service Public Affairs on 9828 6848