Research to Improve the Lives of Children with Nerve and Muscle Disorders

A new initiative will build capacity in paediatric research. Associate Professor Joshua Burns has been jointly appointed to the Faculty of Health Sciences by The University of Sydney and the Institute for Neuroscience and Muscle Research at Kids Research Institute, The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

His area of research focus is Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT), Australia’s most common genetic nerve disorder. He has recently returned from Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit where he was a 2009 Fulbright Scholar.

CMT is an inherited disorder that can affect people at any age, progressively causing muscle weakness mainly in the hands and feet and leading to lifelong pain and disability. It has a profound impact on quality of life, independence and normal everyday functioning.

"The program at The Children's Hospital is important because by exploring treatment options at a young age we can lessen the pain and disability, and possibly even prevent the disease from taking hold", said A/Prof Burns.

Working out the best way to measure disease severity in children with nerve and muscle disorders, and improving management with therapeutic trials, is his key focus.

A $6.25 million grant from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) will enable coordinated international management of patients with CMT across multiple research sites world-wide.

"The grant allows for a more robust and meaningful research design, allowing us to work towards best practice guidelines - in essence taking what I have been doing locally – international," concluded A/Prof Burns.

Find out more about Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease - watch Associate Professor Burns on ABC TV's Catalyst program