

Forging **A NEW PATH** treatment options **FOR YOUR**

If you have a severe or chronic ailment and the prescribed treatments don't seem to be working, what do you do? You could try alternative therapies, lifestyle changes, or simply limit the impact on your quality of life as best you can. While these might work for you, there could be another option you may not have considered – one with the potential to not only improve your own health, but also the health of countless others. Clinical trials are the all-important “gatekeepers” between what is developed through medical research and the treatments you have access to today.



A VETERAN'S EXPERIENCE OF CLINICAL TRIALS

FORMER Air Force Aircraft Maintenance Technician Gerry Reu had picked up a few aches and pains from his nine years in the Defence Force. He experienced chronic pain in his knees and back, and mild hearing loss from working around jet engines. He described his issues as “inconvenient, but not anything terminal”. That changed in 2006, when the impact of his military service well and truly caught up with him.

Over breakfast one morning, Gerry's daughter noticed an odd mark on his shoulder and insisted he get it checked. Not long after, his doctor was breaking the news – Gerry had a level 4 metastatic melanoma.

Gerry's case was just one of a growing multitude. The Australian Government estimates there will be 14,320 new melanoma cases diagnosed this year – contributing to a total of 138,321 new cancer cases. Melanoma is of particular interest to the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation (GMRF), as it is one of the identified health conditions known to occur

frequently in our veteran community.

“When I was in the Air Force, I was always out on the tarmac. The sun would reflect off the concrete and it would roast you,” Gerry said. “Even if you're careful, it's the worst possible situation for your skin. Sun safety was not emphasised in those days. But these days, I was doing checks, the doctors were doing checks, the plastic surgeon was doing a lot of work. I was amazed the melanoma had gotten so bad, yet everyone had missed it.”

Within a month of diagnosis, Gerry was in for surgery and it seemed the tumour had been successfully removed. It wasn't long, however, until he was back in the doctor's office being told another melanoma had been discovered. The melanoma was spreading rapidly, and Gerry was having bad reactions in his liver and blood to the treatment available. It appeared that the options had been exhausted. His prognosis was measured

in months, with a terminal end.

It was at this point, earlier this year, that Gerry was offered an unexpected opportunity. He was referred to a doctor who offered him consideration to determine if he was eligible for an ongoing clinical trial conducted by the GMRF.

“When I thought of clinical trials, I just thought of the ‘human guinea pig’, but when I was given sufficient written data I realised it is 100 per cent opposite to what I presumed. I find it exciting to be on this trial. To find something that has the potential to change the whole aspect of things is truly wonderful,” Gerry said.

By their very nature, clinical trials are experimental and offer no guarantees. Gerry's trial is still in the early stages, however, there is an indication at this moment that the treatment is decreasing the size of his cancer. While he hopes for a positive outcome for himself, he knows this trial has the potential to have a much broader impact.

“The real potential of the trial, in my mind, is for the future. I am 68 years old now. The benefit I receive may be relatively short-lived, because of my age. If I get to 78, I think that's not a bad innings. The younger ones, the three- or five-year-olds like my grandkids, are the ones who will really benefit from this research.”

This is the power of clinical trials. Because medical research was developed to the point of testing in a clinical setting, Gerry now has access to innovative cancer treatment and is contributing to a possible advancement in treatment for all cancer sufferers.

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WHY ARE CLINICAL TRIALS SO IMPORTANT?

THE medication prescribed to you by your doctor is the result of years, or even decades, of comprehensive testing in preclinical and clinical settings. Through the data generated from clinical trials, we answer important scientific questions and gain a better understanding about new treatments to ensure they are safe to use and can contribute to improved health outcomes for patients.

Based at Greenslopes Private Hospital, the GMRF operates a Clinical Trials Unit, which manages and coordinates multi-centre national and international clinical research trials.

The trials GMRF is working on have relevance to the veteran community and include testing treatments into illnesses such as liver disease, prostate cancer, lung disease and melanoma. The unit's driving purpose is to deliver clinicians and patients with options to access new and emerging treatments in an effort to advance medical care for all.

Many of the treatments tested by the Clinical Trials Unit have become the new Standard of Care, significantly improving how an illness is treated. As a result of some of these clinical trials, medication has been registered on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, providing subsidised prescription medication to the public.

WHY CONSIDER INVOLVEMENT IN A CLINICAL TRIAL?

While treatments for serious illnesses such as melanoma have improved dramatically, there is still only so much

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they can do, and many patients find that they get to a point where nothing is working for them. As you decide, with the help of your doctor, whether to join a clinical trial, it's important to understand what is involved. Some benefits of participating in a clinical trial include:

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WHAT ARE CLINICAL TRIALS?

Clinical trials investigate the effectiveness and safety of novel treatments and interventions for a range of illnesses and medical conditions. The trial involves volunteers undergoing tests for treatments such as drugs, vaccines, medical devices or preventative and educational strategies, to determine if it is of greater benefit than the treatment options already available. Clinical trials in Australia are tightly regulated and governed by national ethics guidelines and codes of conduct. Participants of trials are well-informed on the objectives, potential risks and what is expected of them.

- Early access to new treatment – The treatment you receive in a clinical trial may be more effective than existing, standard treatments, or fill the void if no treatment is working for you.
- Expert medical attention – Doctors and care teams must closely monitor health-related changes in clinical trial participants. They are required to be alert to problems such as side effects. You may receive more one-on-one care and have more check-ups, as required by the trial.
- Trial costs covered – While there

may still be costs associated with your treatment, the research company is required to pay the trial-related costs.

- Advancement of health care – You can make a difference for generations to come. What researchers learn from your experience on trial can benefit you as well as future patients.

Although clinical trials can provide the latest, most advanced treatment, they are not without risks. Risks can include possible side effects and uncertain outcomes, as there is no guarantee the treatment will work

better than existing treatments.

There's a lot to consider when it comes to participating in a clinical trial, but the outcomes could be life-changing, both for you and for others who may suffer from the same health condition in the future. If you have a severe or chronic ailment that isn't responding to standard treatment, it could be worth considering a clinical trial and starting the conversation with your GP.

To find out more about the research and clinical trials conducted by the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation and how you can get involved, visit www.gallipoliresearch.com.au.