

Tumour hunter hope for disease

Pancreatic cancer scan boost

Rachel Riley

A groundbreaking new tumour hunter could drastically boost survival rates for one of Australia's most lethal cancers by pinpointing more patients who could undergo potentially lifesaving surgery.

The trial of a new PET imaging tracer is helping improve the detection, staging and re-staging of pancreatic cancer, which has claimed the high-profile lives of Dirty Dancing actor Patrick Swayze, Apple founder Steve Jobs and Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin.

The pilot study by the Wesley Research Institute has found revolutionary medical dye, dubbed Ga-FAPI, is outperforming the standard tracer, F-FDG, in finding hidden pancreatic cancer cells during a PET scan.

Both tracers were used on the same 10 patients with suspected or confirmed pancreatic cancer, with Ga-FAPI more sensitively identifying

both primary tumours and metastatic sites.

Ga-FAPI also found additional lesions in three participants that were not otherwise detected, suggesting it could provide clearer images and more accurate cancer staging.

Clinicians reviewing the patient's scans also considered Ga-FAPI more diagnostically useful in five participants and equally useful in the remainder, based on lesion detection, tumour sizing and disease staging.

Study lead Associate Professor David Wong at the I-MED Radiology Network said the findings indicated Ga-FAPI could help clinicians better determine which patients might benefit from surgery versus other treatments.

"This study provides important proof-

of-principle that (Ga-FAPI)

could become a valuable clinical tool in pancreatic cancer imaging," Professor Wong said.

"With (Ga-FAPI), the surgeons are more confident of saying the disease is limited and therefore you can have surgery ... and if you choose the correct patient, hopefully you can have a better outcome.

"If validated in larger studies, the technology could improve outcomes for hundreds of Australians diagnosed with pancreatic cancer each year by enabling earlier and more precise intervention."

Professor Wong said the breakthrough could be a game-changer for vulnerable, older patients facing a dismal five-year pancreatic cancer survival rate of just 14 per cent.

About 4000 Australians die from pancreatic cancer each year.

Late diagnosis and difficulties in accurately staging the disease remain the major barrier to effective treatment.

He said the research team was now planning larger studies involving more patients to further evaluate the role of Ga-FAPI in pancreatic cancer and explore its potential applications in other cancers like lymphoma, melanoma, colorectal and breast cancers, potentially saving countless more lives.

Funding to trial Ga-FAPI on invasive lobular breast cancer patients is being sought first.

