

“CATALYST EFFECT” STATINS STUDY WINS MAJOR AWARD

A STUDY examining the impact of a two-part special edition of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s science journalism program *Catalyst* (titled *Heart of the matter*), which aired in October 2013, on statin use in Australia, is the winner of the 2015 MJA, MDA National Prize for Excellence in Medical Research, for the best research article published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in the previous calendar year.

The winning article, “The crux of the matter: did the ABC’s *Catalyst* program change statin use in Australia?”, was authored by Ms Andrea Schaffer, a biostatistician in the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Sydney; Nicholas Buckley, professor of Clinical Pharmacology at the Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney; Associate Professor Timothy Dobbins from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales; Professor Emily Banks, scientific director of the *45 and Up* study and head of Chronic Disease Epidemiology at the *National* Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University; and Professor Sallie-Anne Pearson, head of the Medicines Policy Research Unit at the Centre for Big Data Research in Health, at the Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales.

The winning study was a population-based interrupted time-series analysis of a 10% sample of Australian long-term concessional beneficiaries who were dispensed statins under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (about 51% of all people who were dispensed a statin between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2014); dispensing of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) was used as a comparator.

The main outcome measure was the change in weekly dispensings and discontinuation of use of statins and PPIs, adjusting for seasonal and long-term trends, overall and (for statins only) stratified by the use of cardiovascular and diabetes medicines.

The researchers found that in their sample, 191 833 people were dispensed an average of 26 946 statins weekly. Following the *Catalyst* program, there was a 2.60% (95% CI, 1.40%–3.77%; $P < 0.001$) reduction in statin dispensing, equivalent to 14 005 fewer dispensings Australia-wide every week.

In the week the *Catalyst* program aired, there was a 28.8% (95% CI, 15.4%–43.7%; $P < 0.001$) increase in discontinuation of statin use, which decayed by 9% per week. An estimated 28 784 additional Australians ceased statin treatment. Discontinuation occurred regardless of the use of other cardiovascular and diabetes medicines.

“Following airing of the *Catalyst* program, there was a temporary increase in discontinuation and a sustained decrease in overall statin dispensing,” the researchers concluded. “Up until 30 June 2014, there were 504 180 fewer dispensings of statins, and we estimate this to have affected 60 897 people.

“Even though the observed effect was relatively small, the prevalence of statin use in Australia and the established efficacy of these drugs mean that a large number of people are affected, and may suffer unnecessary consequences.”

Sponsored by MDA National, this prize awards the authors \$10 000 in cash.

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