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## **\*\*\*Media release\*\*\***

### **Austin professor awarded fellowship for spinal rehabilitation research**

Austin Health's Director of the Rehabilitation Sciences Research Centre (RSRC), Professor Mary Galea, has been awarded a prestigious 2007 Churchill Fellowship.

The Fellowship will enable Prof Galea to travel to the United States, Canada, Switzerland and the United Kingdom to investigate active rehabilitation programs for people with spinal cord injury.

Churchill Fellowships are awarded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to provide financial support to enable Australian citizens to travel overseas to undertake study of a project that cannot be readily undertaken in Australia.

Prof Galea says she is delighted to have received the Fellowship and hopes her findings will be used to enhance rehabilitation programs in Australian centres.

"It is a great honour to be awarded the Fellowship and to join the ranks of other Fellows who are passionate about their work and who wish to make a contribution to Australian society in all its diversity," Prof Galea said.

"I see the Fellowship as providing a wonderful opportunity to investigate rehabilitation programs for spinal cord injury overseas and to use the information towards improving and extending rehabilitation programs in Australia," she said.

Prof Galea's ongoing research at the RSRC, based at the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre in Kew, is concerned with understanding the mechanisms underlying control of movement and promoting recovery following nervous system injury.

"Through my research, I hope to highlight the role of rehabilitation in improving function and the quality of life, not only for people with spinal cord injury, but also for those with other nervous system diseases such as stroke," she said.

One of the ways Prof Galea is helping to give rehabilitation new prominence is by encouraging active exercise techniques such as electrical stimulation and treadmill training.

These techniques encourage the nerve fibres spared by a spinal cord injury to 'sprout' and grow new connections with undamaged pathways, which Mary says is providing hope for people suffering spinal cord injury.

"With these findings and those of other research teams around the world, there is now a real prospect of treatments for spinal cord injury in humans," Prof Galea said.

"A great deal of the focus of medical research has rightly been in the prevention of disease and its acute management.

"However, it is not sufficient just to save lives. We need to ensure that those people whose lives have been saved can be helped to achieve the highest level of function and quality of life," she said.

Prof Galea plans to utilise the Fellowship in November.

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