



UCC in European thyroid study

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A NEW research project investigating treatment practices for a mildly underactive thyroid gland has the potential to significantly improve the health and wellbeing of older people with this common condition.

A mildly underactive thyroid, a condition also known as subclinical hypothyroidism (SCH), affects about one in six people over the age of 65 and has been linked to various health problems, such as heart attacks and strokes, in later life.

Dr Patricia Kearney, senior lecturer at the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at **University College Cork**, is one of a group of researchers from five European universities who will participate in the study. Titled Thyroid Hormone Replacement for Subclinical Hypothyroidism Trial (Trust), the project is funded by a €6 million grant from the EU's FP7 programme.

Trust researchers will follow 3,000 older subjects – which includes 750 patients in Ireland – over a five-year period in an attempt to better understand how to treat people who suffer from subclinical hypothyroidism.

Academics from **UCC** will collaborate with experts in ageing, thyroid problems and vascular disease from Scotland, the Netherlands and Switzerland on the Trust project.

Located in the neck, the thyroid gland controls how quickly the body uses energy, produces proteins and how sensitive the body is to other hormones.

“Clinical hypothyroidism is in between full hypothyroidism and normal function of the gland and we need to learn how best to manage this common condition,” said Dr Kearney.

The trial will investigate whether hormone replacement therapy could reduce the incidence of heart attack and stroke in people with clinical hypothyroidism. It will also try to measure quality-of-life issues related to the condition such as energy levels and the condition of the patient's skin and hair.