

Vitamin C trialled as life-saving treatment intensive care patients with sepsis

12 June 2018, by Kim Thomas



Associate Professor Carr says sepsis is the main cause of death in the ICU. Credit: University of Otago

University of Otago, Christchurch researchers are teaming up with intensive care specialists to study whether intravenous infusions of vitamin C could be a life-saving treatment for patients with sepsis.

Associate Professor Anitra Carr recently started the New Zealand-first study in the Christchurch Intensive Care Unit (ICU). It follows two small clinical trials overseas that reported an almost 80 per cent drop in mortality from the life-threatening condition. The results from using the natural product as a medicine were considered by many to be too good to be true, so the Christchurch project will rigorously test these findings.

Sepsis is a life-threatening complication where the body's response to infection actually damages its tissues and organs. If sepsis progresses to [septic shock](#), blood pressure drops dramatically, and organs fail.

Associate Professor Carr says sepsis is the main cause of death in the ICU. It causes the death of one in five New Zealand ICU patients. Although rates are increasing, [treatment](#) options are limited.

Patients with septic shock are often given drugs to stabilize their cardiovascular function. Associate Professor Carr hypothesises that cardiac dysfunction, and resulting drug treatments, could be avoided if patients had appropriate vitamin C levels. When sepsis patients experience cardiac problems, they are often given drugs to stimulate the cardiovascular system. Vitamin C is potentially involved in a similar natural process, and if levels were high enough patients might not need as much medication, she says.

The Christchurch research team will study whether people with sepsis who get the vitamin to are more likely to survive and have a better recovery than those who get conventional treatment. The group of [patients](#) who get vitamin C will also get conventional treatments.

Associate Professor Carr and her team will also study whether the patient's base level [vitamin C](#) levels relate to the severity of their disease and progression of [sepsis](#).

Provided by University of Otago

APA citation: Vitamin C trialled as life-saving treatment intensive care patients with sepsis (2018, June 12) retrieved 27 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-vitamin-trialled-life-saving-treatment-intensive.html>

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