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News Release

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Brain study to offer insights into causes of killer diseases

People living with stroke and dementia are set to benefit from new research that tackles the underlying causes of the conditions.

Researchers are to shed light on how diseases in small blood vessels – known as SVDs – can cause brain damage.

SVDs account for more than 20 per cent of strokes and up to 40 per cent of dementia cases, scientists say.

Despite the profound impact on human health, there are no effective treatments for the diseases.

A new European network of scientists and clinicians will make use of patient groups and experimental studies to better understand how the conditions can be managed.

The aim of the five-year project is to identify how faults in these small vessels can cause brain damage that leads to stroke or dementia, and explore new therapeutic approaches.

The €6,000,000 project will benefit from a new research MRI scanner and a MR-PET scanner, which will be available in Edinburgh later this year.

Prof Joanna Wardlaw, who is leading the research at the University of Edinburgh, said: “The small vessels are vital for supplying the brain with oxygen and sugar so that it can work properly. Many people have damage in the small vessels in the brain - if we can understand better what causes the damage and how to stop or even fix it, then we expect people to be able to live actively for longer and to stop many cases of dementia and stroke.”

The research is funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together partners from ten universities in Europe and the US, including the Universities of Edinburgh, Oxford, Munich and Copenhagen.

The network will also work with the patient organisation Stroke Alliance for Europe (SAFE, Belgium), and GABO:mi, a German company for project management.

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