



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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Thalassaemia an increasing problem in Australia

Thalassaemia is becoming a significant public health problem in Australia, according to an article published in the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

'Thalassaemia is one of the most widespread single gene disorders in the world and a common cause of hereditary anaemia. It should be suspected when a person has abnormally small red blood cells', writes Professor Donald Bowden of Monash Medical Centre's Thalassaemia Service.

'Screening for thalassaemia has become increasingly important in antenatal testing as Australia experiences an influx of people from countries where thalassaemia is common.

'In Melbourne, approximately 10 percent of women in their first pregnancy required DNA studies to see if they were carriers of thalassaemia. Screening helps to estimate the risk of their children being born with severe disease. Some types of thalassaemia put the lives of mothers and children at risk.

'There is an increasing expectation that prospective parents will be offered antenatal diagnosis if there is an identifiable risk of having a child with severe disease.'

According to Professor Bowden, identification of thalassaemia carriers is a two-stage process. The diagnosis is sometimes difficult, as iron deficiency can confuse the interpretation of test results.

Professor Bowden says these simple tests will reveal most cases of thalassaemia. In some cases, however, DNA testing might be necessary to confirm the diagnosis.

Contact Associate Professor Donald Bowden on 03 9594 2756

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Among other articles, the current issue of ***Australian Prescriber*** also looks at undernutrition in the community, and the treatment of urticaria.