

MEDIA RELEASE

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UTAS scientist tackles cystic fibrosis

A UTAS researcher has uncovered a method to more accurately diagnose lung infections in cystic fibrosis sufferers which could significantly refine their treatment.

Stephen Tristram, from the School of Human Life Sciences, has discovered a new method of testing for *Haemophilus influenzae*, an organism that contributes to the chronic respiratory infections of people with cystic fibrosis.

“If a cystic fibrosis sufferer is found to be suffering from a respiratory infection in which *Haemophilus* is involved, then the treatment is more specific: the better the diagnosis the better the antibiotic therapy,” Mr Tristram said.

Mr Tristram and his honours student, Ahron Rahel, developed the new culture method following a technique first tried 20 years ago, but which was never followed through.

“I have an interest in a particular organism found in cystic fibrosis and asked labs all around Australia to gather it up for me,” he said.

“But they replied that it was too difficult because the organism was always covered by *Pseudomonas*, so I did a literature search and came up with this method which had never been followed through or evaluated.”

Microbiologists have previously found *Haemophilus* difficult to detect because of the pervasive presence of another organism, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which clouds other organisms in a sample.

Mr Tristram has trialled the testing method in laboratory-controlled “mock specimens” and plans to roll out the test next year to cystic fibrosis centres across Australia.

The discovery is especially pertinent in Tasmania, where the rate of cystic fibrosis is significantly higher than in the rest of Australia. More than 90 per cent of cystic fibrosis sufferers die from the complications of respiratory disease and have a life expectancy of around 35 years.

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