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ALL NEUROLOGICAL CONDITIONS

December 13, 2017

WA researcher finds UV delays onset of MS

In a world-first, a Perth Professor has delayed the development of MS in high-risk individuals using narrowband UVB treatment, something used to treat the skin condition psoriasis. Trials conducted by Professor Prue Hart found that in 3 out of 10 people, with a single episode of MS who were treated with UVB, the progression of their MS was halted.

“We’re just blown away, we’re very pleased with the results. We had two groups of 10 people, of the 10-people given the UVB treatment we’ve delayed the development of multiple sclerosis in 30% of them. Whereas those who didn’t get the phototherapy, unfortunately all of them have progressed from a very early form of disease to what is classified as MS,” said Professor Hart.

“This is clinically significant and an example of where UV is not all bad. The intervention is very similar to that given to patients with psoriasis, where narrowband UVB phototherapy has proven safe and effective, with very minimal adverse side effects.”

The 20-people chosen for the UVB trial (PhoCIS) had been diagnosed with clinically isolated syndrome (CIS), the first presentation of a disease that shows characteristics of inflammatory demyelination that could be MS, but has yet to progress.

All of the group had sufficient levels of vitamin D. Half of them received the standard UVB phototherapy, three times a week for eight weeks.

“It’s well known that the incidence of MS increases the further you are away from the Equator. Levels of vitamin D are a biomarker of being in the sun but also a number of other molecules are created, some are known, some are unknown. That gave us a clue that UV could be regulating the disease.” added Professor Hart.

“We’re also taking blood samples from the group to find markers in the blood to understand why some people get MS and why others stay in the pre-form or early form of MS. We’re interrogating what molecules are in the blood, can they give us clues as to why this disease is progressing from an early form to actual MS.”

Funding for the UV research is partly provided by MSWA and forms part of the record \$2.6 million invested into finding the cause, cure and treatment for MS and other neurological conditions. For third year in a row, MSWA has set aside substantial amounts of money for local research.

“Professor Hart’s trial and the results are very exciting and it’s fantastic that this is happening in Perth. It could be a vital breakthrough or at least be another piece in the jigsaw puzzle for people all around the world being able to better manage or control their MS,” said MSWA CEO, Marcus Stafford AM.

“MSWA’s funding of this research is part of our broader remit of now offering specialist support and services for people with more than 30 neurological conditions, including



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Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, acquired brain injuries and motor neurone disease."

Professor Hart has been studying the effects of UV for 20 years and believes it's not just people with MS who could benefit from phototherapy.

"UV phototherapy might help people with Type 1 diabetes or who've had a stroke. We've been too strict with the messaging around exposure to the sun. We're not getting enough UV exposure because of a fear of skin cancer, kids are being wrapped in cotton wool."

Professor Hart wants to get the UV trials replicated in other cities around the world, in particular Edinburgh, which is further away from the Equator and has a higher rate of MS.

"There's also a group in the US keen to replicate our trial, we've got competitors, but no-one has done what we've done, we're the first in the world," said Professor Hart.

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