NINE OUT OF TEN PEOPLE WITH SJÖGREN’S SYNDROME ARE WOMEN

Senior Researcher Dr Allison Sutherland on the path to develop a cell-based therapy to treat patients with Sjögren’s Syndrome at the Queensland Eye Institute.

SJÖGREN’S SYNDROME RESEARCH PROJECT

A world-first trial will use placental stem cell therapy to treat patients with Sjögren’s Syndrome.

The clinical trial hopes to modify the abnormal activity of the immune system and enable the regeneration of the moisture-producing glands lost to the disease.

If successful, the treatment could impact 0.5% of the population and be available in the next 5-10 years. This is a remarkable opportunity for medical advancement for patients suffering from this condition and you could help make a difference.

Donations are needed now.
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Application of Human Placental Mesenchymal Stem/Stromal Cells for the treatment of primary Sjögren’s Syndrome.

WHAT IS PRIMARY SJÖGREN’S SYNDROME?
Primary Sjögren’s Syndrome (pSS) is a chronic autoimmune disease characterised when the body’s immune system attacks its own healthy cells that produce saliva and tears. This results in patients not producing sufficient moisture to lubricate their eyes or mouth.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SJÖGREN’S SYNDROME?
Sjögren’s Syndrome is classified as either primary or secondary. The primary form occurs in people who do not have other rheumatic diseases. The secondary form occurs in people who already have another pre-existing autoimmune disease, most commonly rheumatoid arthritis (RA), but can also be systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), and others.

WHO IS AT RISK?
Primary Sjögren’s Syndrome is strongly biased towards women (9:1), affects an estimated 0.5% of the population and is thought to be caused from a combination of environmental, genetic and hormonal factors.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?
Sjögren’s Syndrome poses a significant impact to patients’ quality of life. Signs and symptoms vary between patients, with the most commonly shared symptoms include:
• Dry eyes, mouth and throat
• Painful swelling of the salivary glands
• Intensified dental decay
• Difficulty swallowing and eating
• Limited ability to taste and smell
• Constant eye irritation
• Photosensitivity
• Gastronomical problems
• Extreme fatigue
• Joint pain
• Organ dysfunction
• Increased risk (5-44 times greater) of developing lymphoma

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?
There is no current cure for pSS, only treatments limited to addressing individual symptoms. This research is a world-first that uses placental mesenchymal stem/stromal cell (P-MSC) therapy and represents a remarkable opportunity for medical advancement for patients suffering from this condition.

WHO IS CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?
The Queensland Eye Institute is working collaboratively with the South Bank Day Hospital (SBDH) and the Wesley Hospital (Wesley Medical Research) with investigators Dr Allison Sutherland and Dr Brendan Cronin.

WHAT DO THESE CLINICAL TRIALS HOPE TO ACHIEVE?
The aim of the clinical trial is to see if the P-MSC therapy has a positive effect on the adaptive immune system following treatment in comparison to standard treatment and whether there are any changes in the disease symptoms or need for standard medications in both the short and long-term. The research has the opportunity to form the first stage of liberating patients suffering from this syndrome.

HOW MUCH WILL THIS COST?
At the commencement of research, this phase of clinical trial is anticipated to cost $500,000 at a minimum. The research is not funded by government or sponsors and relies wholly on charitable donations.

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED TIME FRAMES?
It is anticipated Phase I/IIa will take 2-3 years to complete and if successful will be followed by a larger multicentre Phase III clinical trial. Following completion of Phase III trial would enable submission of regulatory dossier to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for market approval of the product all trials are positive (demonstrated safety and efficacy) and estimated to take between 5 – 10 years.

HOW CAN I HELP?
You can help by making a tax deductible donation to the Queensland Eye Institute Foundation by visiting our website www.qei.org.au/donate.