



Monthly injection stops arthritis in its tracks

Hundreds of thousands of sufferers are offered new hope by a treatment which can stop the disease in its tracks.

By Caroline Gammell
Patients will be given a simple monthly injection of the drug which halts the crippling effects of the condition.

An annual course of the drug, known as tocilizumab, could cost as little as £4,000 and may be available on the NHS as early as January.

The development has been described as "exciting" and "dra-

matic" by the medical profession. The condition, which affects the immune system and causes the body to attack its own joints, affects 487,000 people in the UK.

Around 18,000 are diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) each year, and 70 per cent of those are women.

The drug, which will be sold under the brand name RoActemra, is currently seeking approval from the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

In January it is expected to gain a UK marketing licence. The drug is being heralded as

a "step change" in treatment following a trial in which nearly half of patients on the medication found their condition did not get any worse.

Rheumatoid arthritis causes painful swelling and stiffness in joints - particularly the hands, feet and wrists - as well as bone damage and permanent disability.

The condition develops at an average age of 25, but often is not discovered for many years.

Several drugs have been developed to try and help ease the pain, but as yet, there is no cure.

Tocilizumab works in conjunction with an existing treatment, methotrexate, and is administered monthly in hospital.

In the trial, taking methotrexate on its own only stopped symptoms in eight per cent of patients.

Combined with tocilizumab, 47 per cent of patients saw their condition halted.

Ailsa Bosworth, chief executive of the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS), said: "We are encouraged by these findings, particularly as the treatment shows such promise of achieving remission, the ultimate goal for people with this cruel and debilitating disease."

"It presents new hope for the hundreds of thousands of people who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis in the UK."

Robert Moots, Professor of Rheumatology at the University of Liverpool, said: "These are very exciting results as RA is a nasty disease that ruins thousands of lives and rots away victims' joints."

"Tocilizumab is a really important and powerful weapon in our armoury and offers a great leap forward in the fight against RA."

Dr David Walker, a consultant rheumatologist at Newcastle hospital, added: "RA patients are so stoical and uncomplaining because they are so used to having the pain."

"If this pushes them to remission, the results are dramatic - I think it is very promising."

The international LITHE trial, led by Professor Paul Emery from the University of Leeds, was conducted in 15 countries and

involved 1,190 patients.

X-ray scans assessed the level of bone erosion and the narrowing of joint spaces.

Patients filled in a quality of life questionnaire to see how well they could perform normal daily activities.

Prof Emery said: "Results of this pivotal study convincingly demonstrate that tocilizumab can effectively and rapidly diminish the painful and debilitating effects of rheumatoid arthritis."

"These trial findings are significant because it is critical to stop joint damage as quickly as possible to avoid joint deformity and to help people with RA maintain their quality of life."

The results were presented at the annual meeting of the American College of Rheumatology in San Francisco.

But there was concern in Britain about how long it would take the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Nice) to approve the drug, if at all.

Rheumatology consultants said the NHS Primary Care Trusts were unlikely to use the drug until it was approved by Nice, which said it had received a request for appraisal.

Earlier this year, Nice caused controversy by ruling that rheumatoid arthritis sufferers could not switch from one form of a pain relieving drug to another if the initial treatment did not work.

The NRAS has appealed the decision to refuse the drug which cost about £100 a week per patient.

There are fears that tocilizumab - which could cost between £4,000 and £10,000 - may also be refused.

Professor David Scott, consultant rheumatologist at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital said: "This drug is very exciting, it is a step change, but it is also frustrating that it takes time to use it."

"As a clinician, once your patient has got a disease severe enough to warrant an expensive drug you should be able to use the best drug available and not have to wait for Nice."

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Do You Have By Stander Apathy?

One of the most frightening aspects of urban life is the knowledge that if you are singled out for mugging the chances of anyone helping you is small. Burglaries, car thefts, and purse snatching seem to take place without anyone lifting a finger.

Most people wonder whether the outcome would be different if they were bystanders to such happenings.

Social psychologists have tried to bring this collective inaction to public attention. They believe that bystander apathy is responsible for



much of today's street crimes. If bystanders contributed even minimal support to victims, street crime would decrease.

Studies by psychologists offer explanations for people's failure to intervene.

¥ The difficulty of identifying a crime.

Even when the crime is carried out openly, people often fail to define the event as a crime. Bystanders can define even the most blatant acts of shoplifting and theft in alternative ways.

¥ Lack of motivation.

Once crime is identified, the bystander must want to intervene. For example research suggest that females may be motivated by feelings of empathy with the victim while males tend to be sensitive to the crime's magnitude.

Males are more likely to intervene if the crime is serious than if it is inconsequen-

tial. Being asked to guard someone's property also may motivate a bystander to intervene.

¥ The presence of others. Bystanders who are alone are more likely to take action than are those who are in a group.

Apparently, responsibility for reporting the crime is diffused among group members. However, if a group of

bystanders is urged to help, intervention is more likely to take place than it would be if members of the group were to left to make their own decision.

Why does a victim of a crime fail to report the incident?

Apparently many victims feel that the police will be unable to apprehend the criminal.

In addition, the victim may want to avoid the emotional stress of reliving the unpleasant experience.

Research show that most victims of crime confer with at least one person before deciding what to do.

Clearly, those who are in a position to give advice may have an important influence on whether a crime is reported by a victim. And reporting is certainly worthwhile.

Even if the criminal is not apprehended, the accumulation of reports may lead to an ultimately improvement in systems of public protection.

Dr. R. A. R. Perera Colombo.

Francisco Costa and Ashley Olsen
Calvin Klein's Francisco Costa and Ashley Olsen (in Calvin Klein) engaged in a little mutual admiration before Olsen presented the designer with his award. "Ashley's iconic and she has a youthful style," Costa gushed when asked to describe his fashionable friend. "You're the hot ticket tonight!" Olsen demurred.

CONCERT LINE-UP
Christina Aguilera makes a vibrant arrival at a pre-show press conference in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates Thursday. Later that evening, the pop star was set to make her live Middle East concert debut at the Emirates Palace Hotel.
Francisco Costa

Lindsay Price
"I think this might be my favorite red carpet dress ever," said Lipstick Jungle star Lindsay Price of her violet-hued Versace. "And the people at Versace picked it out just for me, so how could I go wrong?"

ABOUT FACE
She's ready for her touch-up! Kim Kardashian - who recently celebrated her 28th birthday - goes makeup shopping Thursday with sister Kourtney at a MAC store in Beverly Hills.

MODEL PARENTS
Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony (both in Versace) make a chic arrival to Fashion Group International's Night of Stars benefit Thursday at Cipriani Wall Street in New York City. Anthony told PEOPLE at the event that the couple's life is designed around their 8-month-old twins Max and Emme. "Everything smells better, it tastes better, it even feels better on a minute-to-minute basis," he said.

LEADER OF THE 'PACK'
Hillary Duff goes back to school Friday as she hands out goodies to students at the Nina Footwear and Blessings in a Backpack (a nonprofit providing food to kids in need) event at P.S. 15 in New York City's East Village neighborhood.

SEEING SPOTS
Jessica Simpson makes a fierce fashion statement - check out her leopard-print bag! - during a stroll Friday in New York City. During her day out, the singer stopped by Lincoln Center and one of her favorite eateries, Mexican restaurant Dos Caminos.