

Innovation

Irish researchers to lead Alzheimer's drug trials

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A group of Irish researchers is to lead an 18-month drug trial to test a possible new treatment for Alzheimer's. They will be testing the blood pressure drug Nilvadipine in a group of people with Alzheimer's to see if the drug can slow the progression of the disease.

Brian Lawlor, a professor of old age psychiatry at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and a consultant psychiatrist at St James's Hospital in Dublin, is heading up the international consortium, which has been awarded €6m in EU funding by the European Commission's research framework programme FP7. Nine EU countries will be involved in the trials.



*Irish researchers to lead Alzheimer's drug trials
Members of the NILVAD research team from Ireland: Fiona Cregg, Sinead Larkin, Lisa Crosby and Prof Brian Lawlor*

The researchers will be carrying out the clinical trials to test whether the licensed drug Nilvadipine, which is already used to control blood pressure in patients, can be used in Alzheimer's patients to help improve memory and functioning, and also slow the rate of progression of the disease.

The research group, known as NILVAD, has recruited the first group of people who have been diagnosed with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease to take part in the trials.

In all, 500 patients will be taking part in the trials at 23 clinical sites involving Ireland, the UK, France, Greece, Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Germany, and the Netherlands.

In Ireland, 100 people will be participating via two hospitals – St Finbarr's Hospital in Cork and St James's Hospital in Dublin.

There have been no new licensed drug treatments for Alzheimer's disease since 2002. Lawlor said this trial, which is not sponsored by a pharmaceutical company, could have huge importance for the future treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

In 2008, he said St James's Hospital worked with the Roskamp Institute in Florida to carry out a safety study for the potential effectiveness of Nilvadipine in those with Alzheimer's.

Following the success of the safety study, the consortium is now proceeding with phase three of the clinical trial.

Carmel Doyle  