

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN ARTHRITIS RESEARCHERS RECEIVE FDA APPROVAL TO TEST CHINESE HERB

DALLAS – January 22, 1998 – The Food and Drug Administration has granted physicians at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas sole permission to test the effectiveness of a Chinese herb in treating patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

Dr. Peter Lipsky, director of the Harold C. Simmons Arthritis Research Center at UT Southwestern, leads the research team that is treating patients with an extract from the *Tripterygium wilfordii* Hook F vine, known in China as Lei Gong Teng, or "Thunder God Vine." UT Southwestern researchers developed the extract, named Texas Ethyl Acetate (TEA), from one of the vine's 70 components.

"The herb has been used for many years in traditional Chinese medicine to treat arthritis and other autoimmune conditions," Lipsky said. "But other than the UT Southwestern effort, no studies have been done anywhere in this country or anywhere else outside of China."

Patients eligible for the placebo-controlled study are those who have failed to respond to standard therapy, Lipsky said. A total of 108 patients are being recruited from UT Southwestern's arthritis treatment outpatient programs and from the general public. The study is being conducted through the General Clinical Research Center, a National Institutes Health-funded center at UT Southwestern and Parkland Memorial Hospital.

In 1994 Lipsky's team evaluated the vine's toxicity. "We found very little toxicity and quite a bit of benefit," said Lipsky, the Harold C. Simmons Professor in Arthritis Research. "The second phase of our study will help us determine the impact of the drug. We are trying to determine the dose range that might be appropriate for all patients."

In a recent review article for *Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism*, Lipsky noted that traditional Chinese medical practitioners have reported that the vine stimulates blood circulation and relieves joint stiffness and swelling, the hallmarks of rheumatoid arthritis.

Lipsky and his team have spent a considerable amount of time in the past few years

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getting approval for the clinical trials and testing the vine's components to develop TEA. "We think it was all worth it because we are absolutely convinced that the medication we've made is authentic, that it's stable, that it's safe, and now we can determine whether it is effective," he said.

The Thunder God Vine grows densely in the hills of southern China. The medicinal use of the woody, vascular interior of the root has been traced back 2,000 years, when it was prescribed for fever, chills, swelling and skin infections. The root's bark, which is poisonous, is discarded.

Patients interested in being considered for the study should call (214) 648-9349.

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