

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHERS TEST NEW TREATMENT FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA

DALLAS – August 8, 2000 - UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas psychiatry researchers are testing a new way to deliver a schizophrenia drug that may help curtail the problem of patients not taking their medication, which is common in people with schizophrenia.

The drug being tested is a widely prescribed atypical anti-psychotic medication that has been reformulated into an injectable, time-released form that lasts for two weeks, said Dr. Matthew J. Byerly, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry and principal Dallas investigator in the national clinical trial, which will involve 415 patients at numerous academic medical centers.

What's new about the drug is that the anti-psychotic agent is trapped in microspheres, which dissolve slowly in the body and release the drug over time. If the treatment proves successful, then physicians would have an alternative to daily oral medications. While there are older, time-released injectable drugs available, they have many side effects and aren't believed to be as effective as the new drug, which has been used successfully in a daily formulation.

"The medication used in the new treatment is the first of the new generation of atypical anti-psychotic drugs that has been formulated for storage and release over an extended time period," Byerly said.

Volunteer patients in the study will take two to three weeks of oral drug therapy while receiving their initial injections until their blood levels of medication reach the desired level.

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Some study subjects will be given a placebo. All participants will be required to spend one week as an inpatient. UT Southwestern participants will be hospitalized at Zale Lipshy University Hospital.

“This treatment is yet another step toward finding better treatment options for people with schizophrenia,” said Dr. Mary Weber, an instructor of psychiatry in UT Southwestern’s schizophrenia research program.

The researchers explained that while many patients may appreciate not having to take daily pills, the new treatment may turn out to be especially important for patients who have difficulty remembering to take their medication. Byerly said that if the new treatment proves as effective as they anticipate, “there will finally be a good option for people with schizophrenia who have difficulty taking medication each day but who cannot tolerate the side effects of existing long-acting medications.”

The UT Southwestern researchers are working in conjunction with Dallas Metrocare Services, the largest provider of mental health services in the North Texas area, on the study.

For further information about the trial, call Aimee Waerhouse at 214-648-8302.

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