

# NEWS

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\*\*\*\*\*Drug study to test effectiveness of cyclosporine in treating multiple sclerosis.

DALLAS--Neurologists at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas are looking for multiple sclerosis (MS) patients to participate in a two-year research study. The study will determine whether the experimental drug, cyclosporine, used to prevent rejection after organ transplantation, is effective in the treatment of MS.

The health science center MS investigation is part of a nationwide research project sponsored by Sandoz pharmaceutical company, manufacturer of cyclosporine.

Currently, a proven effective treatment for multiple sclerosis does not exist, according to UTHSCD Neurology Associate Professor Dr. Richard Tindall, principle investigator of the study. Tindall is joined in the project by neurologists Dr. Jonathan Walker, also principle investigator, as well as Drs. J. Theodore Phillips, Malcolm Stewart and John Harney.

MS is due to the immune system attacking and injuring the covering of nerves (a myelin coating) in the brain and the spinal cord. Steroid medications may help briefly with sudden relapses of MS, but there are no medications to halt the progressive disabilities produced by the disease when it stays active, according to Tindall.

Patient volunteers entering the study must have an MS diagnosis confirmed by a neurologist and the illness must still be progressing. Patients must be ambulatory, although they may use a cane, walker or occasionally a wheelchair.

Patient volunteers will come to the study center monthly to have blood drawn and a neurologic exam performed so that the drug effects and the effects of the disease can be monitored. All aspects of the study, including the drug and examinations, are paid for by the drug company.

"The drug has shown itself capable in the laboratory of stopping the injury to the myelin covering of nerves," says Tindall. "It may, therefore, prove effective at halting the progression of MS in patients. And it does not have the problems of the traditional immunosuppressive medicines now being used, such as cataracts, bone thinning, hair loss, weight gain, emotional problems, diabetes and arthritis.

"Cyclosporine does, however, have the risks of nausea, tingling, headache, sore gums, tremor and increased infection." Also, he says patients may experience a mild increase in facial hair. Mild thickening of the gums may occur but may be prevented with good oral hygiene.

Tindall is directing another cyclosporine study aimed at testing the effects of the drug on patients with myasthenia gravis, a paralyzing neuromuscular disease. Like MS, myasthenia gravis is an "autoimmune" disease in which destructive antibodies go awry, and instead of attacking foreign particles in the

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bloodstream, attack normal body cells.

Cyclosporine has recently been found effective in curing laboratory animals of a disease simulating myasthenia gravis, Tindall says. The drug has the capability of suppressing the immune system, and in animal studies, seems to correct the primary problem--antibody production.

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