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Research collaboration targets herpes treatment

Philippa Tollitt
Tuesday, 24 May 2011

LEADING Australian contract clinical research company Novotech, Marine Biotechnology Australia and the University of Sydney are taking part in a new herpes research collaboration backed by the Academic Research Council (ARC).

The team aims to commercialise a novel treatment for herpes simplex (HSV1 and HSV2) and herpes zoster (shingles) utilising an extract from the blood of black lip abalone (*haliotis ruber*).



The project is expected to cost \$1.2 million in cash over three years.

ARC, which fosters academic industry collaborations, has made the funding available for research into the abalone derived haemocyanin product.

Tasmania-based company MBA has been researching the novel glycoprotein with antiviral activity for the past five years.

Novotech has been working with MBA for three years.

The new research collaboration with the University of Sydney under the ARC agreement is underway and is expected to move to human clinical trials in mid-2011.

"An 18 month development study undertaken by Sydney-based Protech on behalf of MBA had identified significant anti-viral activity associated with the abalone blood extract and may be effective in the treatment of certain viral infections such as the herpes simplex and herpes zoster," he said.

MBA managing director Adrian Cuthbertson told *BTN* everything is on track, ethics submissions have been made and the collaboration expects to start enrolment in early July.

He said the trial would involve a novel treatment in recurrent cold sore sufferers and it will be conducted at three sites in New South Wales.

The ARC grant will also look at the development of the abalone respiratory molecule as a carrier for use in research and vaccine production.

Novotech chief executive officer Alek Safarian said this research will run through to 2013.

"Novotech is providing regulatory and clinical advisory services to support clinical research and will design the clinical trials program to determine the proteins' potential as the basis for a new drug," he said.

There are currently a range of topical and oral anti-viral treatments on the market ranging from prescription to over the counter medicines.

Cuthbertson told *BTN* the prescription products are for the more severe and/or recurrent cases of cold sore sufferers and this will be a novel product being trialled in the same space.

"If the collaboration is successful, marketing partners will be sought with a worldwide market available," Cuthbertson said.


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