

A potential new drug to prevent flares in ANCA vasculitis

(David Jayne, Vasculitis Clinic, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge).

Once patients have been diagnosed and treated for ANCA vasculitis, the attention turns to stopping the disease returning, a flare or relapse. Most patients are advised to take a drug such as azathioprine or methotrexate for several years, often combined with a low dose of prednisolone. This treatment is not always effective and 30% of patients relapse within three years, with over half having a relapse over a longer time period.

An international clinical trial has recently started to see whether a drug called belimumab can prevent flares or relapses in ANCA vasculitis. Belimumab, also known as Benlysta, has been extensively tested and is now licensed for the treatment of systemic lupus erythematosus, a related autoimmune disease to ANCA vasculitis.

Belimumab is an antibody based drug given once a month by intravenous infusion which has been designed to block a chemical messenger in the blood called BLYS (also known as BAFF). BLYS levels are high when vasculitis is active and BLYS stimulates B cells, a type of white blood cell, to promote vasculitis and produce ANCA. We know B cells are important because they are eliminated by rituximab, and rituximab is an effective treatment for ANCA vasculitis.

The clinical trial is called BREVAS and is sponsored by the drug company GSK. Patients with AAV will be eligible if they have recently been treated for active disease, either new disease or disease relapse, and the vasculitis is now controlled. If they agree to enter they will receive the standard relapse prevention drug azathioprine, and in addition will receive either belimumab or a dummy, placebo. The trial aims to recruit at least 300 patients and see whether belimumab will be effective in stopping flares of disease occurring. BREVAS will also assess how safe belimumab is for vasculitis patients.

BREVAS is now actively recruiting at several vasculitis centres in the UK.

For a list of the centres and for further information please see overleaf.

BREVAS Centres in the UK

Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge

Prof. David Jayne

Please contact Research Nurse James Perry at Telephone Number 01223 217827

Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading

Dr Oliver Flossmann

Please contact Research Nurse Julie Foxton or Linda Jones at Telephone Number 0118 322 8593

St Thomas's Hospital, London

Dr David D'Cruz

Please contact Research Nurse Louise Nel at Telephone Number 0207 188 7188
Ext 83575

Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital, Oxford

Prof. Raashid Luqmani

Please contact Research Nurse Pam Lovegrove, Jennifer O'Donoghue or Alice Harin at Telephone Number 01865 737537

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Aberdeen

Prof. Lars Erwig

Please contact Dr Neil Basu or Research Nurse Vera Herd at Telephone number:
01224 554332 or 554499

Please note that it will be necessary to visit the chosen centre on a monthly basis if you take part in this trial.

The trial will probably last for a year, possibly longer in some cases.

Travel expenses will be re-imbursed.