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**Parkinson's GDNF Trial Halted**

The data describing the clinical trial of glial-derived neurotrophic factor (GDNF), infused directly into the brain, were described during the ANA annual meeting in Toronto (Oct. '04). Safety concerns have halted the open-label segment of the trial, which was due to begin upon completion of the double-blind segment. The reports indicate that GDNF did not provide significant improvement when compared with placebo as judged by tests of motor function during the "off" period. Safety findings have yet to be determined from ongoing toxicology and immunologic studies.

<http://www.newswise.com/p/articles/view/507289/>

**Stem Cell Research and PD Improvement**

Forty PD patients who were L-Dopa responsive and scored >III on Hoehn and Yahr were randomly assigned to embryonic tissue (nigral cell) implants or a placebo (sham) operation. Those who underwent the cell implantation demonstrated better motor functioning than patients who underwent sham surgery. Researchers from Columbia Univ. Medical Center measured changes in movement time and reaction time and correlated those scores with Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale (UPDRS) "off" scores. The difference in groups was statistically significant and greatest in those 60 yrs. or older. Further research into nigral cell implantation for PD is suggested. <http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/61/6/837>

**Research on Umbilical Cord Matrix**

Researchers at Kansas State Univ. have discovered a source of stem cells that is isolated from the matrix of umbilical cords. These cells have a propensity to develop into neural stem cells and may act as a replacement for cells lost due to degenerative disease, trauma, or aging. The cushioning matrix within the umbilical cord is known as Wharton's jelly and is a rich and readily available source of primitive stem

cells, according to the researchers. The cells- called cord matrix stem cells-can be obtained in a non-invasive manner. NIH has partially funded this research along with scientific/educational grants in KS. [http://www.innovations-report.com/html/reports/life\\_sciences/report-34052.html](http://www.innovations-report.com/html/reports/life_sciences/report-34052.html)

### **FDA Approves Parcopa**

Parcopa, a carbidopa-levodopa orally disintegrating tablet, was recently approved by the U.S. FDA and is designed to provide PD patients improved access to medication. Parcopa does not require water and is available in the same strengths and dosage schedule as conventional carbidopa-levodopa tablets. The most common side effects include involuntary movements and nausea. Patients can take their dosage upon awakening to help ease their morning routines and patients may feel a greater sense of control during their "off" periods by having Parcopa readily accessible. <http://www.parcopa.com/>

### **Adding Rasagiline Mesylate to L-Dopa Therapy**

Reports from the European Federation of Neurological Sciences (EFNS) suggest that adjunct therapy with rasagiline mesylate (Agilect), a monoamine oxidase B inhibitor, given once daily to patients with PD experienced a reduction in tremor and improved motor function during "off "time in patients with moderate to advanced PD. The data demonstrated that when compared with placebo, both rasagiline (1mg) and entacapone (200mg), administered with L-Dopa, reduced the tremors as measured by the motor subscale of the UPDRS. A greater improvement in motor functioning for the "off" period occurred with rasagiline rather than entacapone suggesting that rasagiline may have a continuous effect throughout the day and night. Rasagiline is awaiting U.S. FDA approval for marketing. [http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release\\_html\\_b1?release\\_id=72184](http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release_html_b1?release_id=72184)

### **Medical Hypothesis about Homocysteine and L-Dopa**

Evidence has linked elevation to serum homocysteine to an increased risk of coronary artery disease, stroke, and dementia. An increase in homocysteine level in PD has been reported in those treated with L-Dopa. A breakdown in L-Dopa by catechol-O-methyltransferase (COMT) is suggested to increase homocysteine formation; however other modifying influences may be vitamin B status and genetic factors. Perhaps PD patients are at an increased risk for stroke, heart disease, dementia, and other accelerated nigral degeneration. At present, no controlled study has evaluated this phenomenon, although future studies are suggested. <http://www.neurology.org/cgi/content/abstract/63/5/886>

### **Homocysteine and Depression in PD**

Patients with PD who also have high levels of homocysteine are more likely to be depressed than patients with PD who have normal levels of this amino acid. In 97 patients with recent onset PD, 32% had elevated homocysteine levels, were more depressed, and experienced decreased cognitive functioning when compared with controls. Homocysteine levels may be associated with L-Dopa use.

<http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/61/6/865>

### **PD and Alzheimer's Disease (AD):**

Although some families may share susceptible genes for both PD and AD, the overlap in susceptible PD and AD genes is probably rare. In a case-control study from Columbia University, 487 persons with PD (without dementia) were compared with 409 matched controls. Through structured interviews, the researchers determined disease status in over 4500 first-degree relatives of those with PD and in over 2200 matched controls. The risk of AD was not increased in relatives of those with PD and the risk of PD was not increased in relatives of those with AD when both groups were compared with controls. <http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/61/7/1033?maxtoshow>

### **Advancing Parkinson's Therapies**

Advancing Parkinson's Therapies (APT) is an initiative that combines the National Parkinson Foundation, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), and seven leading Parkinson's groups to hasten the development of new treatments for PD. APT will seek to increase awareness and participation of the patient community in clinical research. Currently, an estimated 5,000 persons with PD participate in clinical trials; the researchers would like the number to double or triple. To achieve these goals, a new website about PD clinical trials is being launched (<http://www.pdtrials.org/>) and patient educational brochures and bulletins on trials will be available. [www.parkinson.org](http://www.parkinson.org)

### **New Series of Books for Patients**

A new series of patient education books has been released from the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) and the AAN Enterprises, Inc. (AANE). The first book in the series, "Migraines and Other Headaches," was published in Spring '04 and 20 additional volumes will occur in the next five years. The next three books will focus on ALS, AD, and Guillain-Barre9. These monographs may correct some of the more unreliable information on the Internet and in the press. <http://www.neurotodayonline.com/>

### **PD News From Houston**

*In recognition of National Caregiving Month in November, the PADRECC caregivers will be acknowledged at our Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> Patient and Family Forum: "Sleep and PD" (Aliya Sarwar, MD) and "An Overview of PD Research" (Eugene Lai, MD, PhD, Dir. of PADRECC). 4<sup>th</sup> floor Auditorium, 11:00 AM.*

*The MEDVAMC is sponsoring a seminar "Caregiving and PD" (N. Nelson, PhD) on Nov. 9<sup>th</sup> at 12 Noon in the Dental Conference Rm. PADRECC clinic events will also honor the caregivers during November.*

*The Houston Area Parkinson's Society (HAPS) is sponsoring their annual symposium and 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party on Sat., Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM, at the Arabia Shrine Center, 2900 No. Braeswood, Houston.*

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