

New trial offers hope on dementia

SUE DUNLEVY

TESTING of a new drug to treat Alzheimer's disease will begin on Australian patients within months.

Xanomem, which blocks the stress hormone cortisol, is being billed as the next blockbuster drug after it improved mental function in mice.

Australian company Actinogen Medical will begin trials in Melbourne, Sydney, and on the NSW Central Coast.

The placebo controlled 12-week trial, involving more than 170 patients with mild dementia in Australia, Britain and the United States, will examine whether the drug improves the subjects' mental function.

A CSIRO study of 1000 elderly Australians that began in 2006 found a link between elevated cortisol in the blood and the subsequent development of Alzheimer's disease.

In 2015, an Edinburgh University study in mice showed reducing cortisol in the brain improved memory and decreased the number of amyloid plaques in the brain associated with Alzheimer's disease.

And a 2016 study at the same university showed Xanomem crossed the blood-brain barrier, was safe in humans, and decreased cortisol production in healthy humans.

Actinogen Medical managing director Dr Bill Ketselby said the drug might also be useful to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other mental problems.

Researchers also want to study whether it might help heart attack recovery.

More than 413,000 Australians have dementia. By 2050, that figure will near a million.

It killed 12,625 Australians in 2015 and is forecast to overtake heart disease as our biggest killer by 2021.

Alzheimer's Australia chief executive Maree McCabe said finding a way to diagnose Alzheimer's disease early was just as important as finding a cure — it begins developing 20 years before symptoms appear.

Researchers at the University of California have devised a genetic "score" they claim can predict a person's likelihood of developing Alzheimer's.

Several teams are working on blood tests to diagnose it decades earlier.

\$2b drugs haul

DAVID HURLEY

Australian, Chinese police hammer ice syndicate

ILLEGAL drugs worth \$2 billion have been seized in a joint investigation by Australian and Chinese police.

Almost 7.5 tonnes of illicit substances, including crystal methamphetamine, or ice, have been confiscated since November 2015.

The Australian Federal Police and their counterparts in China focused their investigation on Guangzhou province in southeast China, the epicentre of an illicit trade,

accounting for 70 per cent of ice smuggled into Australia.

Figures released to the Herald Sun reveal that as of February 18, 7356kg of drugs and precursors had been seized.

In Australia, police seized 2414kg of drugs and precursors, worth a total of just over \$1 billion. This haul included 1633kg of methamphetamine, 581kg of ephedrine, and 200kg of cocaine.

In China, police seized 4942.84kg of drugs and precursors, worth \$1.1 billion. That includes 935.12kg of ice, 15.9kg of liquid methamphetamine, 680kg of ecstasy, and 331.8kg of precursor material.

The joint police investigation, known as Taskforce Blaze, focused on airports, seaports, and on mail and parcel post distribution centres in China and Australia.

Federal Justice Minister Michael Keenan said organised crime "knows no borders", and the co-operation between Australia and China occurring as a result of the taskforce's work was paying "substantial dividends". The intelligence exchange was crucial to identifying syndicates and individuals exporting crystal methamphetamine from China, he said.

"This is the first ever joint agency taskforce of its kind in the world and is proving to be as successful as it is unprecedented," Mr Keenan told the Herald Sun.

"Together, our countries are disrupting the trade of organised criminals that peddle in the misery of drug trafficking," he said.

David Hurley @DHPH.HERALDSUN EDITORIAL, PAGE 22

IRIS KEEPS FITNESS ON TRACK

IRIS Dixon, 87, peddles the virtues of cycling for women; and (inset) with her father, George Bent, in 1949. Picture: TIM CARRAFA

IRIS Dixon is calling on Victorian women to dust off their bicycles and get onto the track — whatever their age.

The 87-year-old, who has been riding competitively since age 14, has won 16 national championships and 25 Victorian titles.

And she is still

ANNA-LENA JANZEN

unstoppable, riding at the Preston Cycling Club track three times a week with a group of 10 other retirees — the Golden Oldies.

"I just go. It's like an addiction," she said.

"You've got to keep a certain level of fitness and

this is how I keep it up."

And as the only female rider in her group, Mrs Dixon wants to be a role model for women of all ages.

"I'm sure a lot more ladies would ride their bikes if they were aware they can go on the track instead of riding on the road," Mrs Dixon said.

Less than half of Melbourne's bike riders are women, although participation among adults and children is growing, says Cycling Victoria spokesman Mark Drebblich.

"There are so many benefits from cycling for women and families, yet research is showing that real

and perceived barriers exist that are stopping women from jumping on a bike," Mr Drebblich said.

For Mrs Dixon, there is more to cycling than physical fitness.

"It's social. We chat while riding, we have a cup of tea afterwards, and meet for a monthly barbecue," she said.

BANDERAS KEEN TO RETURN

SPANISH actor Antonio Banderas has opened up about the heart attack he suffered two months ago, but says he is now well and believes the best of his career is yet to come.

"I had a heart attack on January 28, but I was very lucky. It was benign and caused no damage," he said. "I underwent an operation, where they implanted three stents in my coronary arteries, and since I had

suffered from arrhythmia for quite some time, I underwent thermoablation, but it wasn't as dramatic as they say."

He blamed the attack on the "real beating" he'd given his heart over 37 years spent being a workaholic, but said he now felt very well and was keen to get back to work.

Banderas wants to start directing again, something he enjoyed doing in two of his films, despite perhaps being "a little too green".



Antonio Banderas

Making cents of tap-and-go

INVISIBLE money is increasing the pressure on parents to teach their children modern financial lessons.

The disappearance of dollars and cents has been accelerated by tap-and-go technology and online micro payments, prompting a warning from money specialists for parents to change their thinking.

They say traditional methods of financial learning are disappearing along with cash,

ANTHONY KEANE

which means parents must have more open discussions about family finances and help children learn about money on the technology used today.

Catapult Wealth financial planner John Lawler said just as school lunches were moving to online ordering, mobile phones were fast becoming people's primary payment tool. Allowing children some

credit on their phones and tablet computers could be a good training tool.

"You need to stick to your guns — if you don't and they run out of credit and your solution is to give them more, you won't achieve the outcome you want," Mr Lawler said.

Research by comparison website finder.com.au found that just 33 per cent of parents openly discussed family finances in front of their children.