

NEWSFRONT

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Drug trial starts to tackle one of nation's biggest killers

New Alzheimer's hope

A NEW drug to beat the nation's second biggest killer, Alzheimer's disease, will be trialled on Australian patients within months.

Xanomem blocks the stress hormone cortisol to improve mental function and is being billed as the world's next blockbuster drug after it improved the mental function of mice.

Australian company Actinogen Medical will begin trials of the drug on the Central Coast of NSW, as well as Sydney and Melbourne.

More than 170 patients with



SUE DUNLEVY

mild dementia in Australia, the UK and the US will take part in the placebo-controlled 12-week trial.

University of Newcastle professor Jonathan Sturm, whose patients will take part in the trial, said although the new pill was promising, "it's still an early stage study".

"It's very important to get new treatments - the current treatments boost neurotransmitters so they treat the symptoms but they don't treat the underlying disease," he said.

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.

In 2015, an Edinburgh University study on mice showed reducing cortisol in the brain improved their memory and reduced the number of

amyloid plaques in the brain that are associated with Alzheimer's. A 2016 study at the same university showed Xanomem was safe in humans, reduced the production of cortisol in healthy humans and successfully crossed the blood-brain barrier.

The next phase of testing will determine whether it improves the mental function of people with mild dementia.

Actinogen Medical managing director Bill Ketelby says the medication may also be useful in treating post-trau-

matic stress disorder, anxiety and other mental problems.

Researchers also want to study whether it might help patients recover from heart attacks. More than 413,000 Australians have dementia and nearly a million will have the disease by 2050.

The disease, which damages the brain resulting in impaired memory, thinking and behaviour, 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 welcomed the trial and said it would provide new hope for patients and their families.

"Finding a way to diagnose Alzheimer's disease early is just as important as finding a cure," she said.

Researchers at the University of California recently devised a genetic "score" they claim can predict a person's likelihood of developing Alzheimer's and several research teams are working on blood tests to diagnose the disease decades earlier.



HIT: Sydney band Pretures, who appeared on the bill with Boy & Bear at the Botanic Gardens' Day on the Lawn yesterday. PICTURE: MATT THOMPSON

TWO of Australia's most popular live bands headlined the first Day on the Lawn at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens.

Boy & Bear and fellow Sydney band the Pretures topped the bill at yesterday's

gig. The Pretures' 2013 hit, *Is This How You Feel?* put the four-piece rock outfit on the world stage.

The song was ninth in Triple J's Hottest 100 poll and won the Vanda & Young songwriting competition.

For five-time ARIA award winner Boy & Bear,

yesterday's show was the band's final live show for this year.

The band - Dave Hosking, Killian Gavin, Tim Hart, Jon Hart and Dave Symes -

formed in 2009 but became major stars in 2011 when their debut album *Moonfire* won

them five ARIA awards, with three songs voted into Triple J's Hottest 100 countdown.

Their much awaited second album *Harlequin Dream* then

debuted at No. 1 on the ARIA Albums Chart in 2013.

Singles *Southern Sun* and *Harlequin Dream* both made it into the 2013 Hottest 100 countdown. Boy & Bear's third album, *Limit Of Love*, also debuted at No. 1 in 2015.

Liberals praise late bill penalties

BLAIR GICKARDS

THE State Government says the penalty interest policy continues to pay off for Tasmanian businesses by forcing government departments to pay their bills on time.

The late-payment penalty scheme was one of the first policies announced by the Liberals after the election.

Heads of agency were instructed that bills of less than \$50,000 must be paid within 30 days or departments faced paying penalty interest to the business concerned.

The Liberal claimed late bill payments were rife under the former state government, with overdue bills running at 25 per cent and Tasmanian businesses

complaining about difficulties getting money owed by the government.

The latest Treasury figures show 12 to 15 per cent of invoices were overdue during the past 12 months.

Treasurer Peter Gutwein said the figures showed the policy was still working.

"The Government is keeping the pressure on departments to make sure they are paying bills on time and we would like to see the percentage of bills under \$50,000 continue to reduce," he said.

"This is just one of the practical things we are doing to help small businesses in Tasmania and it's one of the reasons that business confidence continues to remain strong under the Hodgman Government."



Peter Gutwein

Diana mental health model

PRINCESS Diana is being used as a role model for schoolchildren in lessons on how to overcome mental health problems.

Diana - who died almost 20 years ago - talked about her experience of depression and the eating disorder bulimia.

The princess is among several figures, including footballer David Beckham and the late *Star Wars* actor Carrie Fisher, who are set to feature in lessons about battling mental conditions. The aim of the UK education scheme is to reduce the stigma of depression.



Princess Diana

US makes Cat sweat on visa

YUSUF Islam, known to his fans around the world as Cat Stevens, faces an indefinite wait for an American visa because of President Donald Trump's travel bans.

The British folk legend, who is in Australia to launch his 50th anniversary tour, has

been waiting months for his US visa to be approved.

"I would definitely like Mr Trump to use his influence ... to rush my visa forward because I've already missed the Grammys and I might even give him a free ticket to one of my concerts," he said.



Cat Stevens