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# CRUCIAL WA TEST

## Is this the Alzheimer's breakthrough the world has been waiting for?



Great expectations:  
First WA patient for  
the new drug trial  
for Alzheimer's, Ian  
McFarlane, with  
partner Helen  
Bourke. Picture:  
Daniel Wilkins

**REGINA TITELIUS**  
Health Reporter

TESTING of a new drug that could revolutionise treatment of Alzheimer's disease has started in Perth, with recruitment of the first WA patient as part of a global trial.

The medicine Xanamem, developed by biotech company Actinogen Medical, which started in WA, has been hailed by scientists as the world's next "blockbuster" drug that could provide a new way of treating the disease that affects more than 413,000 Australians.

While current medications for Alzheimer's only treat symptoms, Xanamem has been shown to help treat the underlying disease by blocking the stress hormone cortisol which then improves mental function.

The new clinical trial, which will have 20 sites across Australia, the US and UK, will be the biggest of its kind ever conducted by an Australian biotech company and builds

on more than a decade of research into the drug.

A study involving WA researchers, published earlier this year, showed raised cortisol was strongly associated with the development of Alzheimer's.

The WA site for the Xanamem trial at Hollywood Hospital is being run in partnership with the Australian Alzheimer's Research Foundation, which is helping recruit eight WA people.

About 170 patients with mild Alzheimer's will be sought across the trial's 20 sites. The treatment course will last 12 weeks and results are expected in early 2019.

The first WA patient to sign up, Ian McFarlane, 63, of North Fremantle, who has no family history of Alzheimer's, said he was hopeful the new drug would work so he could keep his quality of life.

Mr McFarlane, who has four grandchildren and runs a consultancy business, first

noticed memory loss in November 2015. Soon after, his partner Helen Bourke, 53, also spotted his forgetfulness and other behaviour changes.

After months of tests, Mr McFarlane received his official diagnosis in January, just after his birthday.

"We had an inkling that something was wrong but when Ian got the diagnosis, it was such a shock," Ms Bourke said.

Mr McFarlane said he initially tried to cover up his memory loss until he realised he needed help.

"If this drug works, it could change my life," he said.

Actinogen chief executive Dr Bill Ketelbey said Alzheimer's was now Australia's second-biggest killer, with close to 6.5 million Australians expected to be diagnosed with the disease in the next 40 years.

"Age is the single biggest risk factor for developing Alzheimer's and the number of sufferers is doubling every 20 years," he said.