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DISEASE BREAKTHROUGH COULD BE 'HOLY GRAIL'

ALZHEIMER'S HOPE

Zoe Smith

A once-a-day pill being developed in Australia has the potential to be the "holy grail" in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease, researchers have revealed.

The drug, Xanamem, targets the stress hormone

cortisol in the areas of the brain most affected by Alzheimer's, helping to slow down the disease and address cognitive decline.

While it is not a cure, it could offer new hope to the more than 400,000 Australians living with the disease and their families.

Researchers say Xanamem also has the potential to help other types of dementia, including that associated with Parkinson's disease. Almost 400 patients have already been treated with the drug and the results of two further trials are expected in 2026. **Report P5**

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NEWS 05

Alzheimer's 'holy grail'

Groundbreaking Aussie drug could slow course of devastating disease

EXCLUSIVE
Zoe Smith



Dr Steven Gourlay

A once-a-day pill that targets the production of the stress hormone cortisol in the brain has the potential to be the "holy grail" in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

Xanamem, a new therapy being developed by the Australian biotechnology company Actinogen Medical, helps slow down the course of the disease and address cognitive decline.

The disease affected 411,100 Australians in 2023, according to government estimates.

Although it is not a cure, Xanamem's ability to slow cognitive decline could offer new hope. Xanamem is

designed to prevent the excess production of cortisol in parts of the brain most affected by Alzheimer's.

Potential benefits could extend to other dementias such as Lewy body disease, frontotemporal dementia, and dementia associated with Parkinson's disease, Actinogen

chief executive Steven Gourlay said.

More than 380 patients and volunteers have been treated with the drug and its low interaction potential with other medications makes it ideal for those on multiple medications.

Two important phase two trials are under way.

Dr Gourlay said the firm was working towards a partnership with a pharmaceutical giant while moving forward with a fully funded trial.

"That's proceeding well with nearly 30 people enrolled and we'll hopefully have ... final re-

sults about the middle of 2026," he said.

"If it's true that this new trial confirms the previous phase two data, essentially it would mean that we have the holy grail in Alzheimer's disease."

Associate Professor Michael Woodward, a world-leading expert in aged care, who is heading up the trials, said Xanamem represented a groundbreaking approach.

"There's never been another drug that can target and control the cortisol synthesis enzyme in the brain," he said.

the drug would not block the production of normal cortisol in a patient's adrenal glands.

Professor Ralph Martins, director of research at Alzheimer's Research Australia, said Xanamem's ability to target cortisol was important as elevated levels have been shown to damage the brain.

"Over the last two years the first disease-modifying drugs have become available in the US, China and other countries but not Australia," he said.

"While these drugs are very effective at removing the offending culprit, namely beta

amyloid, their ability to slow the decline in memory and cognition is modest and for a limited period of several months. There is therefore a need for other complementary drugs and Xanamem is a promising candidate."

Dementia Australia advocate Susan O'Halloran was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease in 2021.

The 61-year-old said it was a "horrible" disease that left a person feeling like they were "slipping away" and any treatment that could slow the illness would be a "blessing".