

Drug win for Aussie firm

WHO 'names' dementia treatment

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A once-a-day pill that could be the "holy grail" in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease is a step closer to reality after a huge win for the Aussie firm behind the potential wonder drug.

The World Health Organisation has granted Actinogen Medical the nonproprietary name, or generic name, "emestadastat" for its new drug Xanamem. The move recognises Xanamem as the first drug named in its class of enzyme inhibitors targeting cortisol synthesis in the brain.

It is a huge milestone for the firm as few Australian-developed drugs have achieved the WHO's "first-in-class" designation.

Although it is not a cure, Xanamem's ability to slow down the course of Alzheimer's disease and address cognitive decline could offer new hope to patients.

Positive results from two im-

portant phase two trials, which focused on patients with cognitive dysfunction and depression and mild to moderate Alzheimer's, have paved the way for larger trials and it is hoped final results will be available next year.

Xanamem is specifically designed to prevent the excess production of cortisol in areas of the brain most affected by Alzheimer's disease.

This potential could extend to other dementias such as Lewy-Body disease, frontotemporal dementia, and dementia associated with Parkinson's disease, Actinogen's chief executive Professor Steve Gourlay said.

Dr Gourlay said the firm's nod from the WHO was "a great Australian story".

"The WHO has a naming process where you apply and they give you a name, it's not the brand name, it's the name that will always be used for that particular drug," he said.

"What's unique about our

situation is that in giving us the new name, emestadastat, the committee recognised that this is the first of its class to ever be named in this way."

Dr Gourlay said Actinogen was bringing "a truly novel and innovative therapy" to patients and the hope was that the drug would be applicable not just to Alzheimer's but to other types of dementia as well as potentially Parkinson's, depression and other related psychiatric illnesses.

Alzheimer's disease, which results in worsening symptoms over a number of years, affected 411,100 Australians in 2023, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Actinogen adviser Associate Professor Michael Woodward said Xanamem "may offer stabilisation and hopefully a slower decline for people living with dementia".

He said anything that could safely assist to reduce the impact of Alzheimer's disease was "welcome progress".