

Locals to benefit from cocaine addiction study

New patent-pending combination could free addicts

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If you are a cocaine addict and would like to know more about the Embera NeuroTherapeutics cocaine addiction clinical trial, you can call LSU Health Sciences Center's Psychopharmacology Research Clinic at (318) 813-2070 to make an appointment.

Use the link on this page to find out more about the patent-ending drug combination being used in the six-week trial.

After years of watching rats thump a lever to get their fix of cocaine, a local researcher has found a way to make them choose to stop.

Nicholas Goeders' patent-pending combination drug, EMB-001, is now being tested on humans.

Embera NeuroTherapeutics Inc., Goeders' start-up company, is sponsoring the first clinical trial on EMB-001 for the treatment of cocaine addiction. The early phase U.S. Food and Drug Administration clinical trial is being conducted in Shreveport at the LSU Health Sciences Center's Psychopharmacology Research Clinic and is currently enrolling participants.

EMB-001 is a combination of metyrapone and oxazepam, two drugs that have been around for many years, they're safe and could help free cocaine and possibly other addicts from their addiction, says Goeders.

Metyrapone blocks the synthesis of a stress hormone, cortisol, which Goeders' believes is key in addressing addictions. Oxazepam, is in the same class of drugs as valium and has an inhibitory effect on the central nervous system.

"This is where my data took me," said Goeders, a Ph.D. and also the head of the Department of Pharmacology, Toxicology and Neuroscience at LSUHSC, where 25 years of his research took place. "In the rats the change was immediate. I think it will also work in humans."

Positive results could have profound importance in the treatment of addictions.

According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 1.7 million Americans could be classified as dependent on or abusing cocaine in the past 12 months. It's also an addiction that is hard to break. Experts say there is an 80 percent relapse rate following 12-step programs.

"This trial is extremely important," said Dr. Anita Kablinger, a professor of Psychiatry LSUHSC, who will be leading the administration of the trial at the Research Clinic. "There are literally hundreds of studies that are on going trying to find a medication for cocaine users. Right now there is nothing whatsoever. If this worked it would definitely be one of the best breakthroughs."

Embera's combination drug product is a novel approach, said Goeders.

"I've always been interested in the neuro-biology of cocaine and other addictions," he said. "What these drugs do in simplest terms is short-circuit the hormonal response that produce the cravings."

In the study 45 subjects will be divided into three groups and receive the study medication or placebo over a six-week period. One group will get a low dose of the drug, one will get a high dose and the third group will get a placebo.

Getting participants that fit the criteria hasn't been that easy.

There are a few specific criteria for perspective participants: you must be currently using and only be dependent on cocaine.

"We want to be as specific as we can," Kablinger said. "We are allowing people that have an alcohol and marijuana use to apply, but we don't want subjects that are also addicted to methamphetamine or heroine, for example. Meth users will be part of another trial."

The study will be a double-blind study, meaning neither the participant nor Kablinger or her staff will know which person is getting what dose.

Participants will visit the Research Clinic twice a week to have their vitals checked and be tested for any cocaine use. Everything will be kept confidential.

"We'll be able to quantify how much their cravings and drug use go down," Kablinger said.

Another important observation Goeders made in his research with the rats and EMB-001, was that the drug made them also stop responding to conditioned cues, triggers he would attach to the cocaine use for the experiment.

"The rats would hit levers just to get those cues," Goeders said. "After they were given the drug they stopped wanting the triggers too."

Those results make him think the drug could possibly be beneficial for other compulsive disorders, like gambling.

The results from this trial is expected to lead researchers to further trials that will explore the spectrum of use for EMB-001.

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