

Investigating the causes of Parkinson's disease

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A University of Nottingham researcher has been awarded more than £440,000 by the Parkinson's Disease Society (PDS) to investigate the causes of the condition.

Dr Lynn Bedford, of the School of Biomedical Sciences, will lead a five-year study after receiving an award from the PDS under its Career Development Awards Scheme, which aims to support the careers of the UK's most promising individuals working in Parkinson's research.

Dr Bedford will be using a new genetic model of Parkinson's to further understanding of how and why nerve cells die. Her research will also take a closer look at the reasons for the formation of Lewy bodies — a build-up of proteins within nerve cells — in the brains of people with Parkinson's.

This study is aimed at providing a platform for the development of drugs to stop nerve cell death.

Dr Kieran Breen, Director of Research and Development for the Parkinson's Disease Society, said: "Researchers are the people who make the discoveries and forge the links between different research areas so clearly investing in people is key to furthering our understanding of Parkinson's.

"The Career Development Awards Scheme is aimed at increasing the number of people involved in Parkinson's research and encouraging the

UK's top researchers of the future to specialise in Parkinson's."

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition caused by the death of nerve cells in the brain that produce the chemical dopamine, which is responsible for movement. The condition affects movements such as walking, talking, and writing. Its three main symptoms are tremor, muscular rigidity, and slowness of movement. Parkinson's is a very individual condition and the rate and nature of progression varies from person to person.

Dr Bedford said: "I have been involved in Parkinson's disease research for the last five years so I am delighted to get this Career Development Award. This novel model of Parkinson's will be crucial in helping to uncover and study why nerve cells die in the region of the brain affected in Parkinson's disease.

"At Nottingham we have an excellent team who are committed to understanding this model. I look forward to driving this interesting new avenue of research and interacting with individuals, both researchers and clinicians, in the field of Parkinson's."

Approximately 120,000 people in the UK have Parkinson's, and 10,000 are diagnosed with the condition every year. Although more common in people aged over 60, about one in 20 of those diagnosed each year are under 40.

Dr Breen added: "The Parkinson's Disease Society is very pleased to be funding Dr Bedford's study. Furthering our understanding of the causes of Parkinson's will hopefully lead to the development of new treatments for the condition, making a difference to the lives of the 120,000 people in the UK with Parkinson's."

The PDS has spent more than £30m on research since 1969, including

almost £4m in 2006. Studies funded use basic and applied science as well as health and social care projects to investigate the causes, treatment, prevention and cure for Parkinson's.

Source: University of Nottingham

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