

Milestone for cannabinoid MS study

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The CUPID (Cannabinoid Use in Progressive Inflammatory brain Disease) study at the Peninsula Medical School in Plymouth has reached an important milestone with the news that the full cohort of 493 people with multiple sclerosis (MS) has been recruited to the study.

CUPID is a clinical trial which will evaluate whether tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), one of many compounds found in the in the cannabis plant (and the main active ingredient) is able to slow the progression of MS.

This is an important study for people with MS because current treatments either target the immune system in the early stages of MS, or are aimed at easing specific symptoms such as muscle spasms or bladder problems. At present there is no treatment which slows progression of the disease.

The CUPID trial follows an earlier study – Cannabinoids and Multiple Sclerosis (CAMS) – which suggested a link between THC and the slowing of MS. The CAMS trial saw participants take THC for a year – the CUPID trial will last for longer and aims to assess the effect of THC on progressive MS.

It has taken two years to recruit the 493 participants who will each take part in the trial for three years, and in some cases three and a half years. After data cleaning and analysis the results should be available by spring/early summer 2012.

Professor John Zajicek from the Peninsula Medical School, who heads the team carrying out the CUPID study, said: "We are delighted to have achieved the correct number of patient participants for this trial. Patients have been recruited from 27 sites across the UK. If we are able to prove beyond reasonable doubt the link between THC and the slowing down of progressive MS, we will be able to develop an effective therapy for the many thousands of MS sufferers around the world."

The CUPID trial is funded by the Medical Research Council, the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the Multiple Sclerosis Trust.

Chris Jones, chief executive of the MS Trust, commented: "The MS Trust is delighted to be supporting this study on behalf of people with MS. The ability to halt progression in MS is what we dream of - the Holy Grail for those whose condition deteriorates year on year. This study should give us the definitive answer as to whether cannabinoids will prove to be such an agent."

Dr Laura Bell, research communications officer for the MS Society, said: "People affected by MS are keen to know whether there's any truth in the suggestion that elements of the cannabis plant can help ease the symptoms and slow down progression of the condition.

"The MS Society is supportive of safe clinical trials investigating the medicinal properties of cannabis and it's great news that this trial is going ahead. We look forward to the results of this exciting study."

Source: The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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