

Trials begin on potent new hepatitis C drug

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The first clinical trials have started on a new investigational drug, discovered by researchers at Cardiff University, which is being developed to treat infections caused by Hepatitis C virus.

Approximately 170 million people worldwide are affected with [Hepatitis C](#), which can lead to [liver cancer](#), [cirrhosis](#) and death. It is the leading cause of [liver transplantation](#) in western countries. The current treatment involves two drugs - ribavirin and interferon, which has to be given as an injection. Side effects are often severe and lead to patients failing to complete the treatment.

The new drug, INX-189, is taken orally and was first prepared at the Welsh School of Pharmacy in November 2008. Laboratory tests showed it killed 90 per cent of the virus at very low (nanomolar) concentration, making it one of the most potent compounds of its kind developed to date.

US pharmaceutical company Inhibitex, which owns the licence to INX-189 and has been working with the Cardiff team, has now started trials in healthy volunteers to assess the compound's safety. A second trial, which would evaluate the compound's effectiveness on Hepatitis patients, may follow later this year.

Professor Chris McGuigan of the Welsh School of Pharmacy, academic lead on the project, said: "This is still a very early stage of the trials process. However, progress has been encouraging so far, going from the laboratory to human trials within 18 months. We believe that INX-189

offers the possibility of more potency against Hepatitis, more rapid action in the liver, and fewer side effects than existing treatments."

Provided by Cardiff University

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