

Researchers finds Irish Lupus patients likely to benefit from new treatment

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Researchers from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) have discovered that a new treatment for the inflammatory condition, Systemic Lupus Erythmstosus (SLE) could potentially benefit Irish patients who suffer from the condition.

SLE is an autoimmune disease whereby a person's immune system attacks the body's cells and tissue, resulting in inflammation and tissue damage. SLE most often harms the skin, joints, blood vessels, kidneys and the nervous system. SLE is a rare condition in Ireland, affecting approximately 1,500 people. It can affect up to 10 times as many women as men. The research has identified Irish SLE patients that are susceptible to active disease and increased organ damage brought on by lupus as it progresses. This is due to the presence of high levels of a [chemical messenger](#) called [B Lymphocyte](#) Stimulator (BLyS) in the body. This messenger can cause the body's cells to produce antibodies that attack its own tissues, thus causing [organ damage](#).

The effects of BLyS are specifically targeted by a new drug called Belimumab (Benlysta). It is the first drug to be approved by the European Medicines Agency to treat lupus in more than 50 years. The research will help doctors identify patients that are most likely to benefit from the drug as not all patients may respond to the treatment.

Professor Caroline Jefferies, Associate Professor in Molecular and Cellular Therapeutics (MCT), RCSI and principal investigator of the study, commented, 'Lupus is a very complex disease and one of the

biggest challenges, currently, is identifying the patients who are most likely to benefit from [new drugs](#) as they are approved. Our research suggests that simply measuring BLYS levels in patients may identify those who will best respond to Belimumab, thus improving the long-term outcomes for these patients.'

This research was recently published in *Rheumatology*.

Belimumab is used to treat [lupus patients](#) who don't respond to usual medication comprising of a combination of steroids and immunosuppressive anti-inflammatory drugs, both of which have side effects following long-term use.

More information: McCarthy, E. et al. Elevated B lymphocyte stimulator levels are associated with increased damage in an Irish systemic lupus erythematosus cohort. *Rheumatology*.
[doi:10.1093/rheumatology/ket120](https://doi.org/10.1093/rheumatology/ket120)

Provided by Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

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