

Anti-smoking drug may help problem drinkers

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A drug commonly used to help people quit smoking may also help problem drinkers overcome their addiction.

Professor Selena Bartlett from QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI) and an ambassador for Women in Technology (WiT) said trials would soon begin to test whether varenicline, commonly known as Champix, can effectively treat problem drinkers.

"It's well known that many people with serious [alcohol dependency](#) also smoke so we've been trying to better understand the mechanisms behind that," Professor Bartlett said.

"We know that the reward from both drinking and smoking is tied up in the neuronal nicotinic receptors in the brain - Champix binds to these receptors and helps reduce the need to drink at problem levels."

Professor Bartlett, who last night presented the findings at the 2013 Scientific Conference of the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD), said initial findings showed the 'quit smoking' drug effectively turned long-term drinkers into 'social' drinkers.

The drug also normalised dopamine deficiencies, which affect reward-motivated behaviour, in long-term heavy drinkers.

"We tend to look more toward abstinence when treating problem

drinkers, which is very difficult in the long-run," she said.

"We've seen that using Champix suppresses the need for the behaviour that we consider 'problem drinking' by reducing the amount of alcohol needed.

"By being able to curb problem drinking we will effectively be able to reduce harm in the general population."

Clinical trials will begin next year in New South Wales in collaboration with a team lead by Associate Professor Nicholas Lintzeris from Sydney University.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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