

Blood pressure drug could double up as first treatment for common form of dementia

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A 4p per day drug for high blood pressure could become the first ever treatment for one of the most common forms of dementia within a decade, say two leading charities.

The widely prescribed drug amlodipine has shown promising effects in people with [vascular dementia](#), the most common type of dementia after Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's Society and the British Heart Foundation (BHF) have announced the beginning of a major new £2.25 million clinical trial to test the drug's effectiveness in people with the condition.

Experts based at the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences at Queen's University Belfast will recruit nearly 600 people with vascular dementia for a groundbreaking two year trial into the

drug's potential as a dementia treatment.

The researchers, led by Professor Peter Passmore and involving co-investigators, Professor Pat Kehoe and Dr Liz Coulthard from the University of Bristol's School of Clinical Sciences, hope to show that 10 mg a day of the drug can significantly improve memory and cognitive health. As amlodipine is already licensed and known to be safe, the treatment – which costs the NHS just £1.07 a month – could be in use as a treatment within five to ten years.

Vascular dementia is caused by problems with the [blood supply](#) to the brain and affects about 150,000 people in the UK. Those with heart conditions, high cholesterol and diabetes are especially at risk, and it can be triggered by a stroke. There are currently no available treatments for vascular dementia yet there are fewer ongoing clinical trials for the condition than there are for hay fever.

Amlodipine is used to treat [high blood pressure](#), a major risk factor for vascular dementia. It is known to enter the brain and researchers think it might work by protecting brain cells from damage when blood supply to the brain is poor.

Professor Peter Passmore, at Queen's University Belfast School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, said: "Vascular dementia is a very common disease and to date no major trial has been successful in developing an effective treatment for this disease. We hope, using evidence from previous research, and by trialling the drug amlodipine we may get a step closer to improving the outcomes of patients with vascular dementia in the next decade."

Pat Kehoe, Professor of Translational Dementia Research in the School of Clinical Sciences at the University of Bristol, added: "It is fantastic that Bristol, with its rapidly expanding BRACE-supported Clinical

Dementia Research Programme led by Dr Coulthard, will be part of this large trial that shows that the UK is leading the fight against vascular dementia, the second most common form of dementia."

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive at Alzheimer's Society, said: "It's scandalous that despite affecting 150,000 people there are no effective treatments for vascular dementia and very few new treatments under investigation. This groundbreaking trial could be the best hope we have to get an effective treatment in use in the next decade.

"Developing new drugs from scratch can cost hundreds of millions and take up to twenty years but our flagship Drug Discovery programme aims to test existing drugs in people with dementia, fast-tracking the process and bringing new treatments to market faster and more cheaply."

Professor Peter Weissberg, Medical Director at the BHF, added: "The 2.3 million people living with coronary heart disease in the UK are at increased risk of developing vascular dementia. Unfortunately, as yet, there are no effective treatments for this devastating condition.

"Amlodipine is a widely prescribed, [blood pressure](#) lowering treatment that has shown some promising effects in vascular dementia. The BHF and Alzheimer's Society have joined forces to fund this definitive study. If positive, it would pave the way for an affordable treatment for vascular dementia in the near future."

Provided by University of Bristol

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