

Expert highlights research innovation and is optimistic about the future of IBS treatment

October 21 2014



UEG Week 2014 in Vienna. Credit: United European Gastroenterology

Patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may at last be able to hope for a brighter future as innovative new treatments emerge and researchers clarify the role of current therapies. Dr Alexander C. Ford from the Leeds Gastroenterology Institute in Leeds, UK, tells journalists attending the 22nd United European Gastroenterology Week (UEG Week 2014) in Vienna, Austria, that significant progress was being made in drug development for IBS, thanks to the intense research efforts of

scientists around the world. "Researchers have dedicated many years to the task of unravelling the pathophysiology of IBS, and it's thanks to these efforts that novel molecular therapies are now in development," he says.

Current Therapies for IBS

IBS is a chronic, relapsing–remitting functional disorder of the [gastrointestinal tract](#), estimated to affect between 5% and 20% of the general population. The symptoms of IBS include recurrent abdominal pain or discomfort and changes in bowel habit, including diarrhoea and/or constipation. Treatment is typically targeted towards the predominant symptoms, with increased intake of soluble fibre and antispasmodic agents frequently used as first-line therapies. Other treatment options with proven efficacy in IBS include certain antidepressants, [psychological therapies](#) such as cognitive behavioural therapy and hypnotherapy, and some probiotics. "We currently have a number of fairly effective short-term treatments available for patients with IBS, but, unfortunately, no drug treatment has so far been shown to alter the clinical course of IBS, and the long-term efficacy of current therapies is still unknown," says Dr Ford.

Emerging Drug Therapies

Several promising new types of drug therapy have emerged in recent years for the treatment of IBS. Pro-secretory agents have been found to be effective in constipation-predominant IBS although their precise roles in the IBS treatment algorithm is not yet determined. Bile acid modulators are currently under investigation in IBS patients, with initial studies suggesting efficacy in constipation-predominant IBS.

"The number of novel agents in clinical development for the treatment

of IBS is a clear reflection of our growing understanding of the pathogenesis of the condition, but it also demonstrates the extent of the unmet medical need," he says. "I think with the intensity of the research effort going into new IBS treatments, we can be optimistic for both IBS sufferers and the physicians who treat them."

More information: Ford AC, et al. *Am J Gastroenterol* 2014;109(Suppl 1):S2–S26.

Provided by Spink Health

Citation: Expert highlights research innovation and is optimistic about the future of IBS treatment (2014, October 21) retrieved 5 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-expert-highlights-optimistic-future-ibs.html>

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