

'Anti-alcoholism' drug clears key test hurdle

March 20 2012

A drug designed to treat nervous spasms has cleared an important early test in a project to see whether it can also cure alcoholism, French doctors said on Tuesday.

Baclofen -- the lab name for a medication branded as Kemstro, Lioresal and Gablofen -- was successful in a preliminary test among a small group of alcoholics, a result that opens the way to formal clinical trials, they said.

The history of the drug goes back 50 years. It was originally designed for epilepsy before becoming licensed to treat spasticity, but researchers are now interested in using it to ease alcoholic craving.

Interest was sparked in 2008 by a book, *Le Dernier Verre* (The Last Glass), by cardiologist Olivier Ameisen, who self-treated his alcoholism with high doses of baclofen.

The [new test](#) entailed enrolling 132 [heavy drinkers](#) who were given baclofen at high doses over a year.

Eighty percent either became abstinent or became [moderate drinkers](#). By comparison, two drugs that are commonly used to treat alcoholics, naltrexon and acamprosate, yield a success rate of 20-25 percent.

Side effects included fatigue, drowsiness, insomnia, dizziness and digestive troubles.

Lead researcher Philippe Jaury of the University of Paris-Descartes said the outcome opened the door to one-year clinical trials, expected to start in May, in which 320 alcoholics would be divided into two groups.

One batch will receive baclofen, progressively building in dosage until the craving symptoms subside, while the others will receive an inactive lookalike pill, or placebo.

France's health system is paying 750,000 euros (\$469,000) of the 1.2-million-euro (\$1.45-million) cost of the trial, and an unidentified donor is paying the rest, Jaury told AFP.

The pre-trial study is published in a specialist journal, *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

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Citation: 'Anti-alcoholism' drug clears key test hurdle (2012, March 20) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-anti-alcoholism-drug-key-hurdle.html>

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