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New peanut allergy treatment now in clinical trials

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L-R: Dr Sara Prickett, Professor Robyn O'Hehir and Emeritus Professor Jenny Rolland have worked together for years on the peanut allergy research and are co-founders of Aravax P/L. Credit: Monash University

A new peanut allergy treatment developed by Monash researchers is now beginning clinical trials in Melbourne and Adelaide.

Professor Robyn O'Hehir is Professor/Director of the Department of

Allergy, Immunology and Respiratory Medicine at Alfred Health and Monash University. Her research team, co-led by Professor Jennifer Rolland, identified the critical components of the peanut allergy therapy now being developed by Aravax, an Australian spinout biotechnology company.

The technology uses carefully selected fragments of peanut proteins to switch off allergic reactions. The product is designed to be safer, more rapid, and more convenient than other approaches currently under development. The Aravax team anticipates that simple, monthly injections will be sufficient to achieve clinical benefit.

Dr Pascal Hickey, CEO of Aravax, said the team wants to help people around the world who suffer from peanut allergy to live stress-free lives without constantly fearing a major health event from accidental consumption.

"Our technology aims to alleviate that stress by reprogramming the immune system to tolerate peanuts. By creating a safe, convenient and fast solution to a very serious problem we believe our product will have a global health impact by transforming the lives of patients and their carers," Dr Hickey said.

Almost two in every hundred Australians suffer from peanut allergy, and currently there is no therapy to reduce the severity of allergic reactions that can occur following accidental consumption. Despite patients attempting to follow a peanut-free diet, every year around 40 per cent of peanut allergic individuals will suffer a serious adverse event from inadvertent exposure, including anaphylaxis which can lead to death.

Traditionally, allergy specialists have treated patients using repeated doses of the allergy-causing substance. Similar approaches are being explored to treat peanut allergy, but the use of preparations containing

whole peanut protein carries a high risk of severe reactions and requires daily dosing for lengthy periods. Aravax's product is different because it does not contain the parts of peanut protein that cause severe allergic reactions, and its once-a-month dosing regimen is a far simpler solution than remembering to take medication every day.

In the first ever trial of its product known as PVX108, Aravax will evaluate the safety and tolerability of single and repeated administration across a wide range of doses to determine an appropriate dosing regimen. This double-blinded and placebo controlled trial commenced dosing on 10 May 2017 with the first group of subjects safely receiving the lowest dose of PVX108. The trial is being conducted at CMAX Clinical Research in Adelaide, and at Nucleus Network in Melbourne.

Professor O'Hehir said the research has been supported by the Australian Food Allergy Foundation, the Alfred Hospital Trust, and the National Health and Medical Research Council.

"In 2015, we secured AUD $4.85M from the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund (MCRF) to develop the technology through to initial clinical trials. What is really exciting about this is not only the opportunity we have to get our therapeutic product up and running to protect the many sufferers, but that Australian medical research is being funded in Australia for development to clinical trial," Professor O'Hehir said.

More information: Peanut allergy sufferers interested in participating in the trials can contact Aravax for further information. www.aravax.com.au/product-development.html

Provided by Monash University

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