Chinese herbs may be key to unlocking dementia

AUSTRALIA, Sydney – November 30, 2015 – Over 200 Australians with dementia will soon be joining one of the nation’s largest clinical trials for a Chinese herbal medicine which, in pilot studies, has been shown to be an effective treatment improving learning and memory.

Sailuotong (SLT) is a complex combination of ginseng, ginkgo and saffron that has been scientifically developed and tested by a combined team from Xiyuan Hospital, China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences and the National Institute of Complementary Medicine at Western Sydney University.

Over the last 10 years, Sailuotong has been systematically studied in the laboratory and clinical trials.

These preliminary studies have shown Sailuotong improves the cognitive and memory impairment associated with vascular dementia.

Vascular dementia, the second most common form of dementia, maybe associated with numerous mini strokes, some of which may be undetectable to the patient, hypertension and diabetes. The result is memory loss and a decline in cognitive ability.

Chief Investigator of the Phase III clinical trial, Associate Professor Dennis Chang, from the National Institute of Complementary Medicine at Western Sydney University, says Sailuotong is designed specifically for vascular dementia and mixed dementia (Alzheimer’s disease and vascular dementia).

“Current pharmaceutical drug treatments for vascular dementia are ineffective because they don’t address the multiple factors associated with the disease,” says Associate Professor Chang, who specialises in pharmacology and clinical research.

“However in Chinese medicine, the combination of several herbal compounds which work together to address different causes and symptoms of a disease is common.

“Preliminary studies of Sailuotong showed it increased blood flow to the brain and those taking the herbal medicine improved their scores on standard cognitive tests.

“Currently there is no one specific treatment for vascular dementia - if the current Phase III clinical trial is successful, Sailuotong will be a frontline treatment for thousands of people across the world.”

Worldwide, 47.5 million people have dementia and there are 7.7 million new cases every year. In Australia, there is a new case of dementia every six minutes.

Over 342,000 Australians are living with dementia and about 20 to 30 per cent of dementia cases are thought to be vascular dementia.
Professor Daniel Chan, clinical trial Principal Investigator and Medical Director of Aged Care and Rehabilitation at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital, where a pilot study of Sailoutong was conducted, says patients participating in the trial will take two capsules twice a day for 52 weeks and attend clinical visits so their health can be closely monitored.

Patients in trial at five hospital sites in New South Wales and, later planned sites in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, will be randomly selected to receive the active preparation or a placebo.

“Neither the clinician nor the patient will know if they are part of the active or placebo group,” says Professor Chan, a specialist in geriatric medicine.

“We’ll be using standard clinical tests to assess cognitive ability and psychological wellbeing to determine which patients respond to the treatments during the trial.”

For some participants in the trial MRI scans will also be taken to help determine physical changes in the brain.

Associate Professor Chang says Chinese herbal medicines have been used to treat age-related disorders for centuries.

“There are references to herbal remedies being dispensed to boost memory and longevity going back 2,000 years,” says Associate Professor Chang.

“The results of the peer reviewed clinical trial of Sailuotong will not only help determine the action of this unique modern herbal medication on learning and memory, but confirm its capacity to deliver significant improvements in daily function and quality of life in patients with vascular dementia.”

The study has been approved by the Human Ethics Committees of Western Sydney University (Approval Number H10933), South Western Sydney Local Health District (14/046) and the NSW Guardianship Tribunal (Approval Number: 1/2015).

The researchers acknowledge the support of Shineway Pharmaceuticals for this study.

If you are interested in participating in the research trial please phone the hotline on 02 46203578 or email dementiatrial@westernsydney.edu.au.

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Please call Lyn Danninger on 0414 308 701 for further information, or to arrange an interview with the below spokespeople:

- Professor Alan Bensoussan, Executive Director, NICM
- Associate Professor Dennis Chang, Chief Investigator, NICM
- Professor Daniel Chan, Principal Investigator and Medical Director of Aged Care and Rehabilitation at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital, South Western Sydney Local Health District
- Patient available on request

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The international research consortium includes researchers and clinicians from the National Institute of Complementary Medicine, Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital, China’s Xiyan Hospital, China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital, Liverpool Hospital, Wollongong Hospital and, War Memorial Hospital Waverley.

Facts

- **Dementia** is not a single specific disease. It is an umbrella term describing a syndrome associated with more than 100 different diseases that are characterised by the impairment of brain functions, including language, memory, perception, personality and cognitive skills
- Worldwide, 47.5 million people have dementia and there are 7.7 million new cases every year
- **Alzheimer disease** is the most common type of dementia, accounting for about 50% to 75% of dementia cases worldwide
- **Vascular dementia** is generally considered to be the second most common type of dementia, with about 20% to 30% of dementia cases thought to be this type
- Over 342,800 Australians are living with dementia, including three in ten Australians over the age of 85
- In Australia, there is a new case of dementia every six minutes
- By 2050 it is estimated that nearly one million Australians will have dementia, and 7,500 Australians will be diagnosed each week, with a far greater number living with this progressive disabling condition
- Dementia is now the second leading cause of death in Australia and no cure exists
- Deaths due to dementia have increased approximately 137% over the last ten years, with nearly 11,000 deaths recorded in 2013
- The cost of dementia to the Australian health care system is over $6 billion each year

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About the National Institute of Complementary Medicine:
The University of Western Sydney’s National Institute of Complementary Medicine (NICM) is Australia’s leader in complementary medicine research and policy. Seed funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments, NICM plays a key national role in ensuring Australians have access to reliable evidence on complementary medicines and treatments in wide use. As an ERA 5 ranking institute, NICM is globally recognized for its world-class research and innovations in complementary medicine. More information is available at www.nicm.edu.au

About Shineway Pharmaceutical Group:
China Shineway Pharmaceutical Group Limited is the largest Chinese medicine injection and soft capsule manufacturer in the PRC and listed on the Main Board of Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Shineway is one of the Hang Seng Composite Index constituents and is named by Forbes Magazine as Asia’s Best 200 Under a Billion. More information is available at www.shineway.com.hk

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