

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Chinese herbs and vascular dementia

Associate Professor Dennis Chang and Professor Alan Bensoussan from the National Institute of Complementary Medicine are investigating the use of a standardised Chinese herbal medicine formula to treat vascular dementia. The project, which is funded by Australia Shineway Technology Pty. Ltd., comes after a series of preclinical and clinical investigations which showed encouraging results.

'Currently there is no cure for vascular dementia,' says Associate Professor Chang. Dementia is a leading cause of disability in the elderly. Vascular dementia (VaD) is the second most widespread accounting for 15-20 per cent of all dementia cases in Western countries, and it is estimated it will affect more than 150,000 Australians by 2050. Most commonly, it is caused by mini-strokes, which affect cognitive and memory function. 'Traditional Chinese medicine has a well-documented history of using complex herbal formulations for treatment of dementia-like disorders. And evidence exists to support the notion that complex Chinese medicine mixtures can work well in a synergistic way and on more than one therapeutic target.'

Associate Professor Chang's project involves a clinical trial of a Chinese three-herb formulation called Sailuotong which was developed by the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences for the management of VaD. Preclinical studies have determined a dosage regimen and how the herbal extracts work, as well as establishing appropriate safety through toxicity testing.

The study includes more than 200 participants with probable vascular dementia or possible Alzheimer's disease combined with cerebrovascular disease. The patients will be recruited in Sydney, Melbourne



and Scotland. The researchers aim to determine the efficacy of the herbal formula on cognitive function, activities of daily living and quality of life, as well as monitoring its safety as a treatment for dementia.

This project taps into an issue that has significant health, economic and quality of life implications for the millions of Australians who either suffer from dementia or are the carers, family and friends of those who do.

Project Title: A Multicentre, Randomised, Double-Blind, Placebo Controlled Trial to Evaluate the Effectiveness and Safety of Sailuotong, a Standardised Chinese Herbal Medicine Formula in Patients with Vascular Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease with Cerebrovascular Disease

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