

Funding brings Multiple Sclerosis clinical trial closer

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The journey to deliver a new (and first-ever) treatment for secondary progressive MS has been bolstered by a \$1.2 million grant to Dr Anne La Flamme, a long-time associate of the Malaghan Institute, who was recently awarded the funds through the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Education's 2015 Science Investment Round.

MS can be broadly categorised into four basic clinical patterns. While there is no cure, disease-modifying drugs are available but are only effective in the relapsing-remitting form of MS. There are no long-term therapies for the secondary progressive form that causes patients the greatest reduction in quality of life.

Anne's plan is to build on her experimental models and trial the use of low doses of two commonly prescribed anti-psychotic drugs, risperidone and clozapine, in people who have secondary progressive MS.

"These drugs have been used for decades to treat patients with various mental health disorders, but to adapt them to treat MS, we must balance the possible side effects with the drugs' potential therapeutic benefits. Many people assume incorrectly that because a drug has been through clinical trials at a dose specific for one disease, investigations for another purpose would be rudimentary. But taking a higher dose to treat an episode of psychosis is a long way from taking a drug at smaller doses over many years and MS patients may live with their disease for several decades. The ultimate aim for MS researchers worldwide is to find a way to prevent MS. The next best option is to stop the disease progressing and to

restore function lost especially in people with the progressive forms of MS. Finding new treatments for this group of patients will make a huge difference to many lives.” says Anne.

The trial is planned to take 3 years to complete. The ultimate aim of this clinical trial is to determine which drug is more acceptable and shows therapeutic promise.