

Ocrelizumab shows the way forward for research into treatments for progressive forms of MS

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Ocrelizumab, an experimental new treatment option for MS, has had promising results in recent Phase III clinical trials for both primary progressive MS and relapsing remitting MS. Currently, there are no approved treatment options for primary progressive MS. Primary Progressive MS is a form of MS where patients have a gradual worsening of their symptoms from the start of their disease, without the periods of recovery that characterise other forms of MS. 10-15% of people diagnosed with MS have primary progressive MS.

It is thought that the biological processes that lead to progressive MS are different to those in relapsing remitting MS, which may be the reason that treatments that have been successful in relapsing remitting patients have not worked in those with progressive disease.

The recent clinical trial results of ocrelizumab make it the first therapy to have a beneficial effect in the progressive group of patients. While these are early results from the trial and show a relatively small effect on progression, the results have created a great deal of excitement in the MS research community as it raises hope that there may soon be a treatment that can be prescribed for people with progressive MS. It has also generated a buzz as it has created impetus for a new direction of research into progressive MS treatments.

In a recent [commentary](#), Professor Lawrence Steinman, Professor of Neurology at Stanford University said 'the results are on the mild side, but it's a great start. An absolute gift – it's the first time that anything's worked in the field'.

Ocrelizumab acts by targeting B cells in the immune system, a type of cell that is now known to play a central role in the disease process in MS. It is hoped that ocrelizumab will also add to the arsenal of active treatments currently available for relapsing remitting MS, as it also showed a strong effect in suppressing relapses and MRI lesions in a clinical trial for RRMS, with a relatively mild side-effect profile. We await full publication of both trial results for more details, but results to date were discussed in this earlier article [here](#).

The sponsor for ocrelizumab, Roche, plans to submit the full data from the clinical trials to the US Food and Drug Administration in early 2016. Submissions to the regulatory authorities in other countries are likely to follow later in 2016.

Identifying and fast-tracking treatment options for the progressive forms of MS is a key objective of the [International Progressive MS Alliance](#). MS Research Australia is a managing member of the Alliance and has committed A\$1.1 million over 2015-2017. The Alliance will award A\$31 million (€22 million) over six years into new research into progressive MS around the world. Professor Alan Thompson, Chair of the International Progressive MS Alliance Scientific Steering Committee, said of ocrelizumab 'It is not only a source of hope, but also an important milestone that will further inform development for effective treatments for everyone with progressive forms of MS'.