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UNMC study could help in fight against multiple sclerosis

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 Andy Jensen
 Daily Nebraskan

A researcher with the University of Nebraska Medical Center has received a grant from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to study the effectiveness of a drug that could inhibit multiple sclerosis.

Dr. Kalipada Pahan, an associate professor in the UNMC College of Dentistry, is the recipient of the \$274,000, three-year grant.

Pahan said the drug Gemfibrozil, commonly known as Lopid, has been shown to disable nitric oxide production in the brain.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease caused by the overproduction of nitric oxide. This damages nerve fibers and interferes with nervous system functions. It can lead to a loss of coordination, slurred speech, spastic muscles and various vision problems.

The study will use mice injected with tissues that are infected with multiple sclerosis, Pahan said. The mice will be treated with Lopid and then monitored for symptoms like muscle weakness and front-end paralysis.

At that point, Pahan said, the mice's brains and spinal cords will be removed and examined to see the disease's progression.

Dr. Pierre Fayad, chairman of UNMC's Department of Neurological Sciences, said he hoped the findings could be translated into a conclusion toward the drug's effect on humans.

"Dr. Pahan is doing interesting basic research," Fayad said.

Pahan said while it wasn't a sure thing, he was confident Lopid would be effective against the most common form of multiple sclerosis.

"We think the drug should be effective against relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis," he said. "It will possibly also be effective against primary-progressive multiple sclerosis."

Relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis makes up 85 percent of all cases at initial diagnosis. Ten percent of all multiple sclerosis cases are diagnosed as primary-progressive.

In addition to the study using mice, Pahan has submitted an application for a grant to the National Institute of Health along with researchers at UNMC in Omaha to conduct a clinical study of Lopid.

If accepted, the study will test the drug's effectiveness in humans, and compare it to other multiple sclerosis drugs on the market.

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