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New Hope for Stroke Patients

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A drug used to treat Parkinson's disease will be trialled as a treatment for stroke patients working to regain mobility and independence, in the first large scale study of its kind.

A collaborative team of researchers will investigate the impact of combining the drug L-dopa with conventional physiotherapy and occupational therapy to increase stroke patients' ability to relearn fundamental activities such as walking.

Professor Catherine Sackley at the University of Birmingham is working with stroke clinicians, researchers and clinical trial experts in Leeds, Nottingham, Newcastle and the Grampian area of Scotland. She says: "L-dopa is widely used to treat Parkinson's. The drug could prove to be beneficial in enhancing nerve pathways in the brain that are fundamental to learning movements.

"What we hope to find is that by combining L-dopa with routine, established rehabilitation treatments, we can increase the efficacy of current treatments for stroke patients."

L-dopa is an inexpensive drug and if the trial is successful using it to boost the effects of conventional treatments represents a major advance in improving g stroke recovery.

Professor Bhakta, head of the Academic Department of Rehabilitation Medicine in the Leeds Institute of Molecular Medicines says "Recovery from stroke is essentially an educational process – rehabilitation assists the person to relearn skills. We want to find out if using an existing drug in a new context enhances this learning, offering the potential for speedier recovery for many people with stroke."

The research is funded by the Medical Research Council and managed by the National Institute for Health Research.

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