

Pioneering stem cell therapies to be trialled in Birmingham

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University of Birmingham researchers are to lead a worldwide collaboration of scientists looking at the possibility of transplanting stem cells from one person to another to reduce inflammation in the liver.

Prof Philip Newsome (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/iandi/newsome-philip.aspx>) and **Dr Gideon Hirschfield** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/iandi/hirschfield-gideon.aspx>), from the University's School of Immunity and Infection, will lead the €5.4 million Mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) to Reduce Liver Inflammation (MERLIN) programme which will include the first clinical trial of mesenchymal stem cells in liver disease in the UK.

The EU-funded programme will study how mesenchymal stem cells can reduce inflammation in the liver of people suffering from primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC), a disease which causes inflammation and thickening of the bile ducts, build-up of bile in the liver and life-threatening liver disease.

The consortium will study how the actions of mesenchymal stem cells, which are found throughout the body including in teeth and bone marrow, can be improved and prolonged for greater clinical benefit. The consortium, which will work on this programme over the next 4 years, includes partners from the UK, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States.

Prof Newsome said: "Gaining experience of improving the manufacture of mesenchymal stem cells and using them in this clinical trial will address a huge unmet need for treatment of PSC, which is currently incurable. It will also open up extensive opportunities for their use in other common inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and kidney disease."

"This will complement our other ongoing studies of cell therapy, consolidating Birmingham's position as a world-leading centre for cutting-edge clinical trials of novel therapies."

The trial is being funded by the European Commission's Framework Programme 7 (FP7).

Ends

Notes to editors

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