

1 May 2006

***A New Zealand drug that pioneers a wholly new approach to treating Parkinson's disease has been approved for a Phase II clinical trial to begin in May.***

The trial of the new compound, MitoQ, will involve Parkinsons New Zealand and 10 consultant neurologists at the country's main regional hospitals who will assess and advise potential participants, Dr Barry Snow, Clinical Director of Auckland Hospital's Neurology Department, said.

"This is potentially ground breaking technology developed by a New Zealand team. It has already been internationally recognised as the first to effectively target a key mechanism underlying the disease."

Over 800 New Zealanders are now diagnosed with Parkinson's disease every year, Dr Snow said.

"It is a terrific tribute to local expertise that a world-first approach to treating a major disease has been invented here. MitoQ also marks a first in that it will be fully trialled and developed in this country."

Current treatments for PD improve symptoms for a time, but they do not slow the progression of the underlying disease. MitoQ has been invented by Professor Robin Smith at the University of Otago and a former colleague from Otago Dr Michael Murphy of Cambridge University (Medical Research Council, Dunn Human Nutrition Institute).

Last year Antipodean Pharmaceuticals Inc, a company formed by Auckland-based Antipodean Biotechnology Ltd, raised (\$US14.5 million/ \$NZ23.02 million) in New Zealand, the United States and Australia to advance MitoQ's technology.

This investment is understood to be the largest in any new drug development to date in New Zealand.

A progressive neurological disease, Parkinson's affects four million people worldwide, and is marked by tremor, slowness of movement and rigidity. Well known sufferers include Mohammed Ali, the late Pope John Paul II, John Walker and Michael J Fox.

The disease is closely associated with damage caused by oxidants to the organs within the cell known as mitochondria. But where existing treatments focus on symptomatic relief, MitoQ potentially can delay disease progression by directly targeting mitochondria, the nerve cells' energy source and thereby preventing further nerve damage.

Professor Smith said MitoQ had come out of more than ten years work.

"It is extremely rewarding to see how much progress has been made, and having completed Phase I trials to now be able to advance towards a potential treatment," he

said.

Dr Snow said trial participants would need to be people who show signs of Parkinson's but have yet to receive any treatment to relieve symptoms.

Welcoming the trial Deirdre O'Sullivan, National Director of Parkinsons New Zealand, said, "Seeing a genuinely new approach that has been developed in New Zealand succeeding so well in Phase I testing and now proceeding to this stage is very exciting."