



A natural approach to neuropathy

by Jennifer Chung

Relief could be on the way for sufferers of neuropathy. A new study from the Canadian HIV Trials Network (CTN) aims to combat painful HIV-related neuropathy in the feet with an ingredient commonly found in the kitchen pantry.

Neuropathy is a painful and debilitating condition that can affect people with advanced HIV. Symptoms range from mild tingling to severe and excruciating pain in the feet and sometimes in the hands. HIV-related neuropathy is due to nerve damage caused by the virus and can be a side effect of certain anti-HIV drugs.

Led by Dr. John Gill of the Southern Alberta HIV Clinic in Calgary, CTN 221 is testing NGX-4010, a once-daily dermal patch that could help ease the pain and discomfort caused by HIV-related neuropathy. The patch contains a high concentration of trans-capsaicin, a synthetic form of capsaicin—the ingredient that makes chili peppers hot. Researchers believe that capsaicin has the ability to make sensory nerves less sensitive to pain when applied directly to the skin.

“The dermal patch with capsaicin is a natural health product and our hope is that this treatment could provide an alternative to medication for people suffering from HIV-related neuropathy,” says Curtis Sikora, the national research coordinator for CTN 221.

While there are other topical products with a low concentration of capsaicin available to treat chronic pain conditions like neuropathy, many of them require repeated applications to affected areas. This can lead to missed doses and overall problems

with adherence. The hope is that a once-daily patch with a high concentration of capsaicin could potentially provide similar or better pain relief.

During the three-month study, participants will receive treatment for affected areas in the feet where they will receive either an active NGX-4010 patch or low concentration patches for 30 or 60 minutes. Pain will be measured according to the numeric pain rating scale from one to ten, and participants will be required to keep a diary describing their pain each evening following treatment.

This study is looking to recruit 480 participants at sites worldwide, including the Downtown Infectious Diseases Clinic (DIDC) in Vancouver. According to Dr. Brian Conway, director of the DIDC, this study will benefit people in BC and across Canada because NGX-4010 offers an advantage over other types of therapy for HIV-associated neuropathy.

“Patients with this condition are often treated with toxic systemic therapies, which may include narcotics with a significant risk of addiction,” says Conway. “NGX-4010 may provide an effective, non-systemic approach to this very serious problem.”

For more information about CTN 221, visit www.hivnet.ubc.ca.



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Trials enrolling in BC

CTN 147 — Early Versus Delayed Pneumococcal Vaccination
BC sites: Downtown Infectious Disease Clinic (DIDC) and St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver; Medical Arts Health Research Group, Kelowna General Hospital

CTN 194 — Peg-Interferon and Citalopram in Co-infection (PICCO)
BC sites: DIDC, Vancouver

CTN 205 — Valproic Acid and HIV
BC sites: St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver

CTN 214 — Effect of a One-Year Course of HAART in Acute/Early HIV
BC sites: DIDC, Vancouver; Cool Aid Community Health Centre, Victoria

CTN 221 — NGX-4010 for the Treatment of Painful HIV-Associated Neuropathy
BC sites: DIDC, Vancouver

CTN 222 — Canadian Co-infection Cohort
BC sites: DIDC, Vancouver

To find out more about these and other trials, check out the **Canadian HIV Trials database** at www.hivnet.ubc.ca or call 1.800.661.4664.