

Victorian researchers trialling new treatment for macular degeneration

Laser-elimination of drusen deposits reflects a slowing or reversal of degenerative processes that lead to the disease

VICTORIA GOVERNMENT PROVIDES \$540,000 FOR TRIAL

A revolutionary new laser treatment for aged macular degeneration by using a laser to eliminate drusen deposits in retinal tissue is showing promise in a trial being funded by the Victoria government and carried out by the Centre for Eye Research Australia and the University of Melbourne in partnership with Ellex, the manufacturer of the laser.

The head of macular research at CERA, Professor Robyn Guymer, said on 5 May that unlike existing AMD treatments, the Ellex 2RT (Retinal Regeneration Therapy) targets the disease in its early stages, before sight is lost.

“What has been quite unexpected in the trials so far is that the treatment is arresting progression not only in the treated eye but, intriguingly, in the other eye as well,” Prof Guymer said.

Prof Guymer said the treatment involves a novel laser device, an Australian designed and manufactured laser by Ellex R&D Pty Ltd, which is specially designed to deliver a controlled nanosecond dose of laser energy into the eye.

“The initial results suggest retinal regeneration therapy eliminates



Robyn Guymer with a prototype ‘Ellex 2RT’ system, preparing a patient for treatment

drusen deposits which are present in the retinal tissue of people with age-related macular degeneration,” Prof Guymer said.

“Disappearance of the drusen hopefully reflects a slowing or reversal of the degenerative processes that lead to the disease.”

AMD is a progressive disease affecting the macula. An estimated 500,000 Australians – 15 per cent of people over 50 – live with the early

stages of the disease. It is the leading cause of vision loss here and is estimated to cost the community more than \$2.6 billion annually.

Victoria’s innovation minister Mr Gavin Jennings said the retina regeneration therapy Ellex 2RT would be trialled on 50 patients and of the 14 to have undergone the treatment so far most had shown signs of improvement in the degenerative state of the retina.

“The results so far are extremely exciting. The treatment is working consistently and given the positive results to date it is likely people around the world will be keen to use the treatment – the only treatment available to slow the disease,” he said.

The Victoria government provided \$540,000 through the \$41 million Victoria’s Science Agenda Investment Fund for CERA to conduct the trial.

The trial is being carried out at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, with further research contributed to by Dr Erica Fletcher and Professor Algis Vingrys from the University of Melbourne.

“By helping fund trials such as the world-first retina regeneration therapy the government is taking action to help improve the health of millions of people,” Mr Jennings said.

“Victoria is home to some of the world’s leading scientists and scientific facilities and we are committed to supporting this innovative industry that not only improves the quality of lives for Victorians but also creates jobs.”

The announcement coincides with BIO2010 in Chicago, USA where the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser, is leading a Victorian consortium of investors and biotechnology companies. ■

5 British optical bodies uniting to form new Optical Confederation; to protect interests

Five British optical bodies are forming the new Optical Confederation to provide a strong united voice representing patients, the ophthalmic professions and the industry.

Bringing together the voices of the five optical bodies at a meeting in London on 29 April, the confederation reported that it would offer a “strong united voice for excellence in United Kingdom optics” that would represent patients, members of the ophthalmic professionals and the industry.

The confederation will be comprised of the Association of British Dispensing

Opticians, The Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers, the Association of Optometrists, the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians.

At the naming ceremony on April 29, John Fried, deputy master of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers, described the confederation as: “The most productive way of ensuring that we protect patients’ interests, grow the sector, improve scope of practice

and ensure that we are listened to.”

Mr Fried explained that joint committees had now been in operation for 18 months and although there had been “a hiccup or two” such as some committees being oversubscribed

‘A HOUSE DIVIDED CANNOT STAND’

or having “taken time to find their feet”, he said that he doubted “anyone would go back to the old days of each body deciding on its view without consultation, acting unilaterally and then fighting it out against all-comers”.

He said joint working “would not

change the realities or dynamics of any of the organisations who will retain their autonomy and leadership roles”.

Michael Charlton, chairman of the Association of Optometrists, told the audience: “The government has started listening to our combined voice in a new way, with a single message and with a united front. It simply did not listen to us when we worked differently in different ways.”

David Hewlett, chief executive of FODO, commented: “A house divided cannot stand in the past perhaps we could have afforded the luxury of division, but no longer.” ■