

World-leading clinical trial provides new hope for Australians living with multiple sclerosis

A world-leading clinical trial will seek to reverse neurological damage caused by primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) in Australians living with the debilitating condition, in an announcement made today at the MS Australia Progress in Research Conference in Perth.

The first of its kind in Australia, the \$4m trial known as PLATYPUS* will provide a new hope for people living with PPMS, a form of MS which increases in severity over time.

The flexible nature of the multi-arm, multi-stage (MAMS) adaptive design will allow researchers to investigate the potential benefits of several existing medications simultaneously. This means unpromising treatment arms can be dropped and new treatments added, producing results much faster than traditional clinical trial methods.

CEO Melanie Kiely said MSWA, which is contributing \$3m to the trial, was proud to fund the ambitious research project which will transform the way we test treatments for PPMS.

“PLATYPUS has the potential to deliver a significant breakthrough, as we aim to provide real-life outcomes which positively impact the lives of people living with PPMS – which is always our focus,” she said.

“By testing two repurposed drugs, we hope to find a treatment which can be quick to market for the people we support.”

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland said today’s announcement was a major milestone for the 13,000 people living with PPMS in Australia.

“This will ensure a treatment opportunity for people with progressive MS, the greatest unmet need in the MS landscape,” Mr Greenland said.

Neurology Professor Simon Broadley from Griffith University’s School of Medicine and Dentistry said PLATYPUS was an extension of the OCTOPUS** clinical trial, funded by the UK MS Society and launched in April 2023.

“Collaborating with our OCTOPUS partners in the UK, we’ll be trialling the drugs metformin, which is typically used to treat type 2 diabetes, and alpha-lipoic acid which is a health food supplement,” Professor Broadley said.



“Both therapies have shown promise in promoting remyelination and/or repairing myelin in MS.”

MSWA Chair Horst Bemmerl said the PLATYPUS trial would open a world of possibilities for people with PPMS.

“What is so exciting about PLATYPUS is that people living with MS, like myself, often say ‘a cure won’t happen in my lifetime’ due to the time required to bring new medications to market,” he said.

“PLATYPUS is different, as it’s using existing medications that have shown potential in treating PPMS. Because they have already been tested, they can be fast-tracked.”

Mr Bemmerl was proud to see Australia join the OCTOPUS program ahead of other major players across the globe.

“Researchers from the OCTOPUS program were extremely keen on more countries contributing to this research, as this increases the chance of delivering effective results,” he said.

“Australia has joined the project ahead of many other countries who will eventually take part, such as Canada and the United States, so it really is groundbreaking.”

The PLATYPUS trial will be rolled out across Australia through a collaboration of 20 academic and healthcare institutions and aims to recruit more than 250 participants in Australia.

****Platform Adaptive Trial for remYelination and neuroProtection in mUltiple Sclerosis (PLATYPUS)***

*****Optimal Clinical Trials Platform for Multiple Sclerosis (OCTOPUS)***

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