

WELLBEING



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Brain injuries resulting from stroke are a major and increasing public health problem in both developed and developing countries worldwide.

The need for education about stroke and stroke prevention is overwhelming — 15 million worldwide suffer a stroke each year, according to figures from the World Health Organisation.

One in three of these people die, while one third are left with varying degrees of disability. Another one third of stroke victims recover without disability. With an increasing population of elderly people, stroke is becoming a major health issue worldwide.

Fortunately, there is hope on the horizon for stroke patients and caregivers. It comes from an unlikely source.

In China, stroke is treated using traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which has been developed over thousands of years. China's extensive experience in the use of traditional Chinese medicines in stroke therapy indicates that TCM preparations are effective, with few or no side-effects.

Groups of TCM drugs have been identified as potential sources for compounds with predominant effects on the circulation, thrombogenesis, inflammatory processes and neuroprotection. There are more than 100 traditional medicines in use for stroke therapy in China. Some of their therapeutic effects have been confirmed by recent clinical studies.

In a large number of studies, the effectiveness of TCM stroke therapy has been evaluated based on the use of a scoring scheme developed for this purpose. Evaluation includes the status of the patient's consciousness, language ability, mobility of upper and lower limbs and functional abilities before and after TCM treatment.

Other factors contributing to the overall score includes the treatment outcome, such as mortality or discharge to home, and the existence of other medical complications. Clinical data from those studies suggest that TCM stroke medicines are effective and

Traditional THERAPY



Stroke victims are being treated with traditional Chinese medicine. Nazir Keshvani finds out more.

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merit further investigation.

The therapeutic effects of Chinese medicines for the treatment of stroke have also been documented in a large body of almost exclusively Chinese literature. Nearly 50 journals (47 on TCM and two on integrated traditional and Western medicine) are pub-

lished regularly in China.

The integration of Chinese TCM and Western pharmacology constitutes a potentially rich source for drug discovery and development.

In Singapore, Neuroaid (or 'Danqi Jiaonang' in Mandarin), a TCM developed in China to aid stroke recovery, has been approved by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) of Singapore for use as a Chinese Proprietary Medicine.

The medicine is developed from natural ingredients and has been proven to relieve physical and neurological disabilities during clinical trials in China involving 800 stroke patients. Currently, about half a million patients have been treated with Neuroaid in China.

According to Moleac, a biopharmaceutical company in Singapore that markets Neuroaid, the medicine helps to bring about a faster and fuller recovery for stroke patients during rehabilitation.

"Stroke is a life-shattering event, yet very few people can recognise the symptoms or understand the devastating impact stroke can have on patients and families," says David Pickard, CEO of Moleac.

"From the trials, Neuroaid has demonstrated high levels of safety and efficacy in improving stroke rehabilitation, even when taken several months after a stroke onset," Pickard adds.

Neuroaid is available at selected pharmacies in Singapore, as well as directly from Moleac. More research will be undertaken on the medicine next year and in 2008 by a panel of experts on stroke in accordance with Western research methods.

The research will be conducted by Chimes, a Singaporean non-profit society founded by a group of key opinion leaders in stroke, South-east Asia regional experts and clinicians.

The research will be conducted in compliance with Western clinical trial standard methodology and constitutes an innovation in bridging Eastern and Western medicine.

"We have initiated several registration filings with health authorities in a number of countries and are establishing local partnerships to speed up the availability of Neuroaid internationally," says Pickard.

Moleac, which is headquartered in Singapore's Biopolis, a world-class purpose built complex for biomedical sciences research, has a stated aim of bringing together the best of Asian and Western medicines.

"We identify promising medicine discovered in China and develop them into Western mainstream medicine," explains Pickard. "Conversely, we develop and market in Asia innovative technologies and medical products that we in-license from Europe, selling them through our extensive sales and distribution channels."

Pickard, who co-founded Moleac, is also responsible for structuring the team, identifying key scientific, clinical, and business partners in China, Singapore and Europe, and implementing the business model.

Prior to founding Moleac, Pickard spent ten years at The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), where he was a member of the worldwide Health Care Practice Area.

Between 1997 and 1999, he was with the Shanghai office of BCG to help build the local practice and has extensive experience working in Greater China and Korea. ■

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