

New TCM drug offers hope for stroke patients

By NOOR AISHA

IT'S not often that you find medication developed around the traditional Chinese concept of supplementing *qi* — the body's vital energy — but new drug, Neuroaid, could pave the way for more such medicines in the future.

Singapore-based Moleac, a bio-medical company, is marketing Neuroaid (or *Danqi Jiaonang* in Mandarin), developed in China as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to aid stroke recovery. It has just received approval from Singapore's Health Sciences Authority for listing as Chinese Proprietary Medicine (CPM).

Neuroaid's approval as CPM here is in line with a current East-meets-West trend, says David Picard, chief executive officer of Moleac.

Addressing stroke symptoms, Neuroaid is supposed to relieve blood stasis. Traditional Chinese doctors looked at *qi*-deficiency as one of the root causes of stroke. If *qi* is blocked or doesn't flow, problems will arise in the body. Neuroaid pills contain 14 natural ingredients which are meant to "help a patient better tap into his or her recovery potential and achieve a fuller recovery", says Mr Picard.

However, he emphasises that Neuroaid should not be used as a substitute for rehabilitation, but rather in combination with it.

"In China, there's a large pool of untapped therapeutics which can potentially fill gaps in the West by providing therapies to treat unaddressed patient needs," he says. "We're not interested in finding something which would be better than paracetamol. We're interested in something where there's currently no treatment, such as Neuroaid for stroke."

According to the Singapore National Stroke Association (SNSA), stroke is the fourth most common cause of death and the biggest cause of long-term disability in Singapore. About 10,400 people are admitted to Singapore hospitals each year due to stroke-related problems.

Clinical trials of Neuroaid — involving 800 stroke patients and conducted in China from 1999 to 2001 —



Mr Picard: Emphasises that people recovering from stroke should not use Neuroaid as a substitute for rehabilitation, but rather in combination with it



showed that patients receiving Neuroaid are two times more likely to recover and regain normal daily functions and speech.

Currently, an estimated half a million patients have been treated with Neuroaid in China, with no major side effects apart from a handful of cases of nausea or vomiting.

In Western medicine terms, Mr Picard explains, Neuroaid works on the concept of neuroplasticity, which is

the ability in our brain to create new links which will replace the damaged part of the brain. As such, it works on improving stroke rehabilitation even when taken several months after onset.

"As of now, there are no drugs in Western medicine that can claim neuroplasticity, and Neuroaid is the first medicine to do this," he adds.

It remains to be seen whether Neuroaid will be able to prevent the onset of a future stroke, and trials are currently being done in this regard. A panel of international and regional experts on stroke has also decided to undertake further research on Neuroaid, in accordance with western research methods. The research — which will be conducted by Chimes, a non-profit organisation — will take place in 2007-2008.

Neuroaid is available at selected pharmacies in Singapore and directly from Moleac. It will soon be available at all China Healthcare's Econ Medicare Centres, Nursing Homes and West Point Hospital. More information can be obtained directly from www.moleac.net