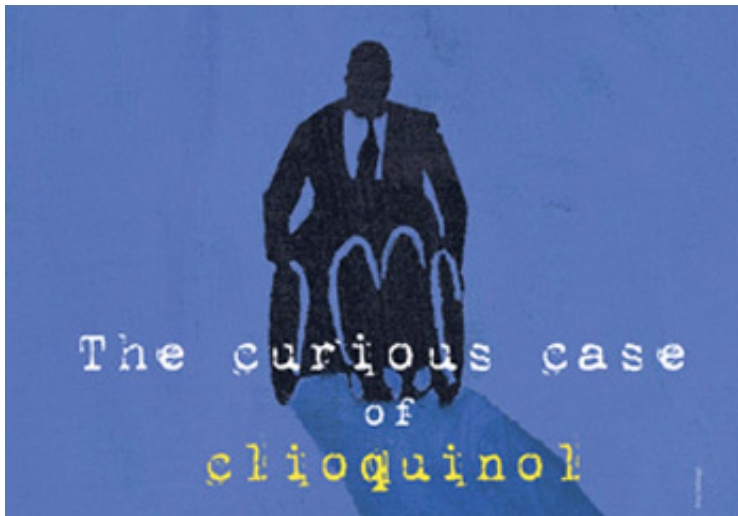


Antibiotic Holds Back Alzheimer's

A drug normally used as an antibiotic has been shown to hold back Alzheimer's disease, it was revealed today. The mental abilities of seriously affected patients declined at a much slower rate when they were given the drug, clioquinol. Although the study was small and only involved 36 individuals, experts say the results are encouraging.



Scientists are already using the findings to develop other possibly more effective drugs. American researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital first showed that clioquinol reduced the build up of protein deposits in the brains of mice.

The beta-amyloid plaques are a key feature of Alzheimer's disease. They are thought to be associated with accumulations of iron, copper and zinc. Clioquinol appears to remove the metals and prevent the plaques forming. Dr Craig Ritchie led the new study, from the Department of Psychiatry at University College London.

Patients taking part were first assessed for indicators of mental performance, such as memory, orientation, language, attention and reasoning. Each was given a score on a scale of zero to 70 used to assess Alzheimer's. As dementia progresses, the score increases. Half the patients were given clioquinol, and half a non-active

"dummy" placebo drug. Of the more seriously affected patients entering the trial, those given clioquinol showed an average score increase over 24 weeks of about 1.5 points. Patients taking the placebo showed an increase of about 8.9 - a difference of 7.4. Generally, untreated patients with mild to moderate disease can be expected to gain six to 12 points in the space of a year.

The findings were reported today in the journal Archives of Neurology. Dr Ritchie said: "The results of this trial have been very encouraging to a clinician." The research had led to the development of other possibly more effective Alzheimer's drugs by the drug company Prana Biotechnology, which makes clioquinol. "UCL plans to be involved in further testing of the principal using clioquinol in a larger UK multi-centre study which is seeking public funding," said Dr Ritchie.

Dr Susanne Sorensen, Head of Research at the Alzheimer's Society, said: "The Alzheimer's Society welcomes this research as the results indicate that there may be a novel use for this already existing drug in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. The results additionally pose new and interesting questions on how clioquinol affects the amyloid proteins in the brain and more research is needed to investigate this effect. "The trial presented here is limited in its scale and the Alzheimer's Society believes it would be valuable to see a larger scale trial.

"The potential for new drugs that may interfere with or revert the progression of Alzheimer's disease gives hope to people with dementia and their carers. There are currently only limited and expensive treatment options available for Alzheimer's disease and none that revert the disease for more than a short period."