



THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEW TREATMENTS FOR PSORIASIS**

Australian psoriasis sufferers may soon be able to access treatment that targets the very cells that cause the problem.

Dr Stephen Shumack of the Australasian College of Dermatologists announced that trials both here and overseas of this totally new class of drug showed great success.

"Psoriasis affects about one in forty Australians," explained Dr Shumack, "and it can vary from causing some minor scalp irritation to affecting every last bit of a patient's skin with a red, scaly, even pustular, eruption. In severe cases, especially in the elderly, it can actually be life-threatening."

Traditionally psoriasis has been treated with a multitude of creams. These therapies are messy, time-consuming and not uniformly effective. A variety of tablets are also used, but these carry a risk of side effects. Light therapy is very inconvenient for patients and may put them at increased risk of skin cancer.

Dr Shumack stated: "The reason we have so many treatments is that none work all the time. Even when effective, the beneficial effects often wear off. All can produce side effects and some patients just don't tolerate some therapies."

This revolutionary new group of medicaments are called 'biologicals'. They target those cells of the immune system responsible for psoriasis. This means that the rest of the body is almost unaffected. Other drugs aimed against the immune system, cause a much greater reduction in immunity and thereby increase sufferers' chances of infection, or even cancer." The evidence so far is that the 'biologicals' are less likely to cause these problems.

The treatments come in the form of an injection. They include *alefacept*, *etanercept*, *efalizumab* and *infliximab*. At the moment they remain expensive and are still in the trial phase.

These are the direct result of research by dermatologists and scientists from around the world. An expert in the field, Professor Alan Menter of the University of Texas has been invited to Australia to share his experiences in developing this exciting new group of agents, at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australasian College of Dermatologists in Sydney.

"Australian dermatologists are acutely aware of the enormous distress this chronic, recurrent and incurable disease causes our patients. The biologicals may well revolutionise psoriasis treatment and we are determined that our patients will continue to receive world standard care," said Dr Shumack

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