TACKLING CORNEAL TRANSPLANTATION FAILURE FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE, EXPLORING VISICORT

Researchers at the Regenerative Medicine Institute (REMedi) have come together with NUI Galway spin-out company Orbsen Therapeutics, and the Centre for Cell Manufacturing Ireland (CCMI), to lead a €6 million EU Framework Programme 7-funded project aimed at better understanding the adverse immune responses to corneal transplants. The researchers also aim to improve corneal transplant outcomes using a stem cell therapy to modify the immune response in high-risk corneal transplant recipients.

Known as “VISICORT” (Adverse Immune Responses and their Prevention in Corneal Transplantation), the five-year project is being jointly coordinated by Prof. Matthew Griffin and Dr. Thomas Ritter in partnership with 11 other academic and industry-based partners from France, Germany, Denmark and the UK.

Speaking at the launch of the project, Prof. Griffin said, “It is extremely exciting to have the opportunity to collaborate with such an outstanding group of researchers from different parts of Europe. Our common goal of further improving the results of corneal transplantation through a better understanding of the immune response can only be achieved by combining the skills and resources of all the partners.”

Dr. Thomas Ritter added, “In recent years, our Immunology research programme at REMedi has focused at a basic level on understanding the immune response to transplanted tissues such as the cornea as well as on the immune altering effects of stem cells. VISICORT now gives us the chance to apply this research to people with severe eye disease who can benefit from new tests and cellular therapies.”

The Galway teams will be building on an existing model system which shows that stem cells can have a positive effect on the immune system during transplantation leading to an improvement in the overall success of corneal transplants. The final year of the project will involve a clinical trial testing the usefulness of stem cells in corneal transplant, using cells manufactured at NUI Galway in the CCMI.

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FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE, EXPLORING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey

HBSC is a cross-national study on young people’s health and health behaviour in 43 countries and regions across Europe and North America. With child and adolescent health a key priority in Ireland and globally, the HPRC uses its findings to inform policy and practice to improve the lives of young people.

A pioneering cross-national study on young people’s health and health behaviour is underway within the Health Promotion Research Centre (HPRC) at NUI Galway. Drs Saoirse Nic Gabhainn, Michal Molcho and Colette Kelly were successful in securing funding from the Dept. of Health to collect and analyse data on health and health behaviours from representative samples of school children in Ireland.

The research collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe is conducted every four years in 43 countries and regions across Europe and North America. With child and adolescent health a key priority in Ireland and globally, the HPRC uses its findings to inform policy and practice to improve the lives of young people.

The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey is not only about health behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use. Its remit is wide and aims to explore the social determinants of health, with emphasis on family, friends, school and community networks and how they may influence health and wellbeing. The HBSC study dates back to 1982 when only a handful of countries were involved, with Ireland joining in 1994. Today, the research collaboration across 43 regions brings together individuals with a wide range of expertise in areas such as clinical medicine, epidemiology, human biology, paediatrics, pedagogy, psychology, public health, public policy and sociology. This diverse range of perspectives strengthens the study and ensures that adolescent health is considered holistically.

The HBSC Ireland team collect data from children and young people aged 9-18 years every four years. Internationally, data is collected and compared for adolescents aged 11, 13 and 15 years. These years mark a period of increased autonomy that can influence how their health and health-related behaviours develop.

Data collected from children in schools this academic year will be analysed, interpreted and disseminated widely, with consultation from the Dept. of Health on what the data show for young people living in Ireland today. Cross-national comparisons will also enable us to compare policies and practices in other countries and how these may apply or inform our work in Ireland. HBSC member countries and stakeholders at national and international levels can also use our data to monitor young peoples’ health, understand the social determinants of health, and determine effective health improvement interventions.

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HPRC is a designated WHO (World Health Organisation) Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion Research.