

MEDIA RELEASE

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TOP MINDS MEET IN SYDNEY AS FIRST-IN-HUMAN CLINICAL TRIAL RECEIVES FDA APPROVAL FOR NEW CELLULAR THERAPY TO TREAT SPINAL CORD INJURY

Spinal cord injury research hits the spotlight in Sydney on Monday August 13th when the Spinal Cord Injury Network hosts *Connections 2012*.

Keynote speakers include Superman actor the late Christopher Reeve's son, Matthew Reeve, and Dr James Guest from the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis in Florida.

The Miami Project announced today its first-in-human clinical trial that uses Schwann cells to repair acute spinal cord injury had been given the go ahead by the Food and Drugs Administration.

The Phase I safety trial led by Dr James Guest and his team will recruit eight study participants within 3-4 weeks post-injury at the University of Miami.

Dr James Guest said there was considerable evidence to suggest Schwann cells would be safe and hopefully effective in treating some spinal cord injuries in humans.

"Extensive experimental testing suggests Schwann cells reduce tissue loss, help nerve fibres to regenerate as well as repair the myelin sheath that allows nerve fibres to conduct impulses.

"Schwann cells are found in nerves and spontaneously enter the damaged spinal cord after spinal cord injury in most people.

"Because the cells are derived from the person's nerve and returned back to the spinal cord, there is no need to use immune suppressing drugs.

"The beginning of human testing is an important milestone and we are proceeding incrementally to first establish the safety of this therapy," Dr Guest said.

Other cellular therapies for spinal cord injury that have been tested to treat spinal cord injury in humans to date include macrophages, embryonic stem cells and olfactory ensheathing cells.

The Geron study of oligodendrocyte progenitor cells derived from an embryonic stem cell line was ended in November 2011 due to financial reasons, after five patients received cells.

Stem Cells Inc. is currently conducting a study using fetal-derived human neural stem cells in Switzerland and the United States.

The Spinal Cord Injury Network is an alliance of leading scientists, healthcare professionals, community members and other key stakeholders who are working together to improve treatments and find a cure for spinal cord injuries.

For details of the *Connections 2012* programme visit www.connections2012.org/

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