

Cortisol-free rheumatoid arthritis medication found effective for rare eye disease

10 October 2016, by Johannes Angerer

A well-known rheumatoid arthritis medication containing the active agent adalimumab, a therapeutic human monoclonal antibody, is also effective for treating non-infectious uveitis, a rare eye disease. This has now been discovered by an international research group, in which MedUni Vienna was also involved with significant participation by Talin Barisani-Asenbauer of the Center for Pathophysiology, Infectiology & Immunology and the Laura Bassi Center at MedUni Vienna. The results of the VISUAL-I study have now been published in the leading journal *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"We were able to prospectively demonstrate for the very first time that non-infectious uveitis can also be successfully treated with a cortisol-free medication. That will significantly improve the management of uveitis patients who have only partially responded to corticosteroids, need a corticosteroid sparing therapy or who are unsuitable for treatment with corticosteroids," explains Barisani-Asenbauer. The biologic [medication](#) adalimumab has long been used to treat rheumatic diseases and has to be injected subcutaneously every two weeks. For sufferers, steroid-free means there are fewer side-effects, so that it can be used over a longer period of time.

In Europe, [up to 5/10,000 people suffer from some form of uveitis](#). Non-anterior, non-infectious uveitis, which was the subject of the recent study, affects around 40 percent of sufferers. Uveitis is the name used for inflammatory conditions of the inner eye, in particular the uvea, which consists of the iris and the ciliary body in the front section and the choroid in the back section.

Inflammation can also affect other parts of the eye, such as the retina and the vitreous body. 70 to 90 percent of sufferers are aged between 20 and 60 and are in the middle of their working lives. The first symptoms are floaters in the visual field, blurred vision, visual disturbances and

photosensitivity. Potential complications of uveitis are macular oedema (accumulation of fluid in the retina), glaucoma or cataracts, for example. Uveitis can even lead to loss of vision.

More information: Glenn J. Jaffe et al. Adalimumab in Patients with Active Noninfectious Uveitis, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1509852](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa1509852)

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