

Drug Combo May Improve Symptoms for Bell Palsy Patients

Toronto, ON – New evidence suggests that treatment with a combination of medications may best improve symptoms of facial paralysis in patients who have Bell Palsy.

“Our results suggest a possible incremental benefit of prescribing antiviral medications in addition to the standard treatment of corticosteroids,” says Dr. John de Almeida, principal investigator of a new report about to be published, and Resident in the Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. “The combination appears to improve recovery by five percent more than the use of corticosteroids alone.”

Bell Palsy is a paralysis or weakness of the facial nerve and has an annual incidence of 20 to 30 per 100,000 population. While 71 percent of untreated patients will completely recover and 84 percent will have complete or near normal recovery, the remainder will have persistent to moderate to severe weakness, facial contracture, or involuntary movement. The researchers indicate a herpes infection is likely the cause of the disorder.

The report, published in the September 2nd issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), is a review and analysis of literature and research comparing treatment with either corticosteroids or antiviral agents measuring levels of satisfaction in the facial recovery of patients treated for different amounts of time and with varying levels of adverse effects. The authors identified 854 studies, of which 18 were eligible for inclusion for evaluation. The 18 studies included 2,786 patients and were conducted in 12 countries and five continents.

The authors say the results are not definitive and did not quite reach statistical significance. “Further primary studies are needed to definitely establish – or refute – an incremental benefit of combined therapy compared with corticosteroid mono therapy,” says Dr. Joseph Chen, also an author of the report and otolaryngologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

“The question this research poses is whether the addition of antiviral drugs to treatment would significantly improve recovery and therefore the quality of life for our patients, safely,” says Dr. Chen, also an Associate Professor of Otolaryngology at the University of Toronto.