



THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE
OF DERMATOLOGISTS

Media Release

VISITING EXPERT OFFERS NEW HOPE FOR ECZEMA SUFFERERS

A leading international expert on eczema – one of the most common skin diseases – says breakthroughs in understanding of what causes the notoriously frustrating inflammatory skin condition are opening up a new era of treatments for sufferers.

The understanding and treatment of eczema is being revolutionized by new insights and influences over the cause of the irritating condition, estimated to affect as many as 6 million Australians.

“We’re realizing that there’s interplay between the abnormalities of the epidermal barrier and a skin-focused, hyper-active and shifted immune system. What results is a cyclic process in which immune activation drives the epidermal barrier abnormalities and vice versa. The barrier defect translates clinically into loss of water and drier skin with more ingress of things that shouldn’t be getting through such as chemical irritants, allergic triggers, organisms like bacteria,” Dr Paller said.

But new approaches, based on our understanding of eczema, are on their way. “This is going to be the decade for new treatments and approaches to tackling eczema, including new creams and ointments as well as new systemically delivered targeted agents that are the way of the future for treating this disease,” according to Dr Amy Paller, Professor of Dermatology and Paediatric dermatology and Chair of the Department of Dermatology, Feinberg Northwestern University School of Medicine in Chicago.

According to Dr Amy Paller - a key speaker at the 47th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australasian College of Dermatologists in Melbourne from 18th-21st of May – one of the most promising new therapies is **dupilumab** – the FIRST truly promising TARGETED medication for moderate to severe eczema.

“The development of the first targeted agent for eczema is incredibly exciting and has been reported to date only in meetings. Patients have responded very well to the treatment. They’re nearly clear of eczema, and these are very severely affected patients. They’ve shown dramatic improvement, not just clinically but also molecularly. Skin molecular biomarkers of eczema are showing marked improvement of both the skin immune system and the skin barrier - and this is also very exciting,” Dr Paller said.

The new systemically delivered agent is a monoclonal antibody that at this point can only be given by injection into the superficial skin. Dupilumab specifically binds to the Interleukin-4 receptor, which is key for driving inflammation induced by interleukin-4 and interleukin-13, the key Th2 cytokines that are clearly linked to both acute and chronic eczema.

“The results in adults look very good, and this drug will hopefully be moving to trials in children in the not too distant future with similar targeted antibodies and small molecule inhibitors to follow,” Dr Paller said.

The improved understanding of eczema mechanism has translated into a rationale for the use of moisturizers as a key part of eczema care and the possibility of using moisturizers as a vehicle for delivery of some deficient skin components such as ceramides (a skin lipid) and, in the future, filaggrin and other deficient proteins.

New topical agents that suppress the immune activation are also in trials now. One topical agent is a phosphodiesterase 4 inhibitor with a boron structure that is looking promising as a new steroid-free cream.

According to Dr Paller, another major problem in eczema is community acquired bacteria, not only because it's so easy to set up infection, but because the bacteria themselves drive the immune activation.

“It's now standard of care in the United States to use antiseptics - through a simple and cheap technique of adding a little bleach (sodium hypochlorite) to bath water - and in the US there are some newer commercially available agents adapted for the shower. These agents have made a huge difference, especially for more severely affected children and children who develop infections. To discuss any of these new therapeutic options, parents should see a dermatologist or paediatric dermatologist,” Dr Paller said.

Amy Paller, MD, is Professor of Dermatology and Paediatrics and Chair of the Department of Dermatology, Feinberg North Western University School of Medicine, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

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N.B. The 47th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australasian College of Dermatologists will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), 1 Convention Centre Place, South Wharf – from Sunday the 18th of May to Wednesday the 21st of May.

For all media enquiries, including arranging media access to the ASM and for all media interviews, please phone Peter Cassuben on mobile: 0417 980 009