



Business News

Stem cell treatment could help heart attack patients

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by [Graham Henry](#), Western Mail

A SOUTH WALES stem cell company, pioneering a treatment that could help "hundreds of thousands" of heart attack victims in the UK, could make it available as early as next year.

The treatment – produced by Cell Therapy, a bioscience company founded by Nobel Prize winner Sir Martin Evans and Dr Ajan Reginald, a former senior executive with Roche Pharma – may be rolled out across the UK in 25 specialist centres "within a year" after the completion of testing.

It is believed to be the world's first medicine that reduces the size of scarring induced by heart attacks and has the potential to massively increase the life expectancy for millions of sufferers worldwide each year.

The company, which is headquartered in Cardiff and has research bases in the capital and Swansea, is looking to create up to a 1,000 jobs by 2020 – including 500 "high-quality" jobs in Wales – under plans to offer the treatment across the UK and Western Europe.

Dr Reginald set up the company in July 2009 with Sir Martin – who jointly won the Nobel Prize for Medicine with Mario Capecchi and Oliver Smithies, for discoveries concerning embryonic stem cells and DNA recombination in mammals.



The new treatment can be rolled out so soon because the cell therapy pioneered by the firm uses the patient's own cells and is essentially a transplant – so it does not follow complex regulatory approval associated with new medicines.

It would be administered in hospital through an IV drip, which the company's founders say will mean that it will be easy for hospitals to use.

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Dr Reginald, the chief executive and chairman of the company, said that the treatment had the potential to help up to 250,000 patients per year in the UK who suffer from this disease and "significantly" reduce the costs to the NHS.

"We are completing laboratory experiments to prove the technology works at the moment, but have already had interest from leading heart specialists to offer our treatment to very sick patients that have no other options left to them.

"Cell Therapy will do our best to help and offer this treatment on compassionate grounds to these first patients.

"The team is working as fast as possible to help these patients as soon as possible. The aim is to provide initial therapies to the leading specialists by the end of the year and launch in the UK late in 2011.

"We would very much like to complete our research and commercialisation in Wales."

Around 250,000 patients in the UK suffer heart attacks every year and around 12,000 die from heart-related diseases across Wales each year.

Dr Reginald said that it was "remarkable" that a treatment for the disease had not emerged before.

Cell Therapy's work aims to produce more personalised treatment using a patient's own cells – so-called "autologous" stem cells – to avoid potential side-effects and is less controversial as it does not involve the use of embryonic stem cells.

"From our perspective a lot of medicines have been developed using non-autologous therapies and this therapy is tailored to each patient and may increase the benefit to and reduce the risk to each patient," he said.

"The disease that we picked to develop treatment for was heart attacks because it is very common and serious. It is an important disease and it is remarkable that something that is so well-documented and widespread does not have a therapy for it."

The venture has been supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and Cardiff council, which is the only external funding the venture has had, although the value of the funding could not be disclosed.

Cell Therapy also collaborated with the Prince of Wales Innovation Scholars (Powis) programme, which brought three graduates to work under Sir Martin. The project aims to bring the private sector in Wales together with higher education and young graduates from across the globe.

Dr Reginald said that the Powis scheme has enabled the company to benefit from "exceptional expertise" from across the globe, with recruits from San Diego, Switzerland, Sweden and Germany relocating to work in Wales.

He said: "For a venture like this, you need money and strong expertise – and that is difficult to get here – it does happen in Boston and San Francisco but it is quite unusual in the UK.

"We have also been strongly supported by Powis and the quality of the graduates. We've benefited from the expertise of these young people and we're lucky to attract these people from all over the world to come and work with us in Wales."