



Diagnosing Parkinson's before symptoms start

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December 17, 2011

A way to diagnose Parkinson's disease — before symptoms even start — is being tested by McMaster researchers.

Dr. Ram Mishra, the lead investigator of the study, says right now between 25 and 40 per cent of people diagnosed with the disabling disorder of the brain don't actually have Parkinson's.

That's significant because the drugs used to treat it can have severe side effects.

"There is no simple test to diagnose Parkinson's disease," he said. "You can't really tell, so what happens in many cases is that people are misdiagnosed and put on the drug they use for the treatment."

Mishra and his colleagues at Université Laval and Université de Montréal believe they have found a protein that could be used as a biomarker to flag Parkinson's disease. They have received \$700,000, of which about \$350,000 will go to McMaster, from the Quebec Consortium for Drug Discovery to see how reliable the biomarker proves to be in Quebec and Ontario patients.

"You can diagnose it in the very early stage before even the onset of the disease," said Mishra.

He said people high at risk, such as those with a family history of Parkinson's or who have had exposure to environmental triggers of the disease, could be tested when they're young. If the catecholamine regulated protein (CRP40) is low, doctors could start to work on that before symptoms start.

"We can turn on the gene for this protein so the body can start making the protein," said Mishra.

It is one of two recent awards for McMaster.

The university has also been chosen to be part of a national network researching the immune system and vaccines. Seven Canadian universities are part of the Human Immunology Network funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. McMaster's role will be studying immune therapies for cancer.

"What the network will allow us to do is run multi-institutional studies," said Dr. Jonathan Bramson, who is leading McMaster's arm of the network. "In order to move these things forward, you really have to look at them in multiple centres with patients from different demographics."



PARKINSONS. A 66-year-old man with Parkinson's disease. A way to diagnose Parkinson's disease — before symptoms even start — is being tested by McMaster researchers. Torstar News file photo Source: Torstar News file photo

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