

ARTHRITIS, EUROPEAN SCIENTISTS CONFIRM THAT AN ITALIAN DRUG BLOCKS THE DAMAGES TO THE CARTILAGE

From the Congress of Rheumatology in Prague new studies emerged confirming the efficacy of Glucosamine Sulfate in stopping the progression of the illness. And in limiting the pain.

Prague June 13th 2001- Not only a reduction of the arthritis symptoms, particularly pain and disability, but also-for the first time in the world- the possibility of rebuilding cartilage, thus a great portion of the joint structure damaged by the illness. The latest results of a clinical study conducted by Karel Pavelka, President of the Euler's XVI Congress, on the utilization of glucosamine sulfate not only confirms the results of the research published by The Lancet last January, but also opens new possibilities in the fight against arthritis. In Prague, where the European League against Rheumatism congress is being held (the most authoritative European congress of its kind, with eight thousand delegates), experts agreed: the cartilage degenerative process can be stopped with lasting results, thanks to a molecule discovered by Italian research. With great benefit for the patient and its quality of life.

Arthritis has now become one of the great emergencies of our time: it is estimated that it affects more than 5 and a half million people and it is second only to cardiovascular illnesses, with extremely high economical and social costs. When the illness is in an advanced state, in fact, the level of invalidity is high and patients often need help even for the easiest daily tasks. That is why doctors are more inclined not to undermine the symptoms, considering it as an event tied in with the aging process, but pathology to face early enough with all the available remedies.

"It is without a doubt important to combine non-pharmacological and pharmacological therapies in case of necessity-explain Prof. Roy Altman, Rheumatologist and Director of the Arthritic division of Miami University, one of the four experts who participated in developing the arthritis guidelines of the American College of Rheumatology. Surgery remains the last solution, to be performed only when drug treatments fail, such treatments can be divided in analgesic and anti-inflammatory added with a treatment group including intra joint agents and others with an action mechanism not clearly defined yet. Every patient can receive the first type of treatment, the second or all three at the same time".

In addition to analgesics and anti-inflammatory, some selected patients can receive treatments with intra-joint corticosteroid or with hyaluronic acid.

Today there are other alternatives that are becoming of greater importance among possible arthritis therapies, among which molecules that slowly provide long lasting benefits.

"Among these there is also glucosamine sulfate-adds Prof. Altman-that has demonstrated, with the results of over ten clinical studies, a significant superiority over placebo and no substantial difference compared to anti-

inflammatory in controlling the symptoms. The analysis of the most recent studies indicates also a new, important fact: glucosamine sulfate has demonstrated a favorable modifying action on the joint structure compromised during the arthritic illness. For this capability, then glucosamine sulfate should be considered a drug to be given early in the treatment of osteoarthritis”.

“The symptoms control, particularly pain and limited functions especially in the short period-adds Prof. Jean Yves Reginster, the rheumatologist from the University of Liège author of the study published by The Lancet last January-has been the main goal until today in the treatment of osteoarthritis. An objective normally reached with the use on non-specified drugs (analgesic and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) or with specific compounds such as glucosamine sulfate and others that can interfere with some of the illness process. Because of their action mechanism, the compound considered especially for osteoarthritis should be able to not only modify the course of the symptoms in the long term treatment but also favorably influence changes in the joint structures and the progression of the illness, contrary to what was observed with some Fans that can also provoke a deterioration of the arthritis”.

The study conducted by Prof. Reginster in Liège on 212 people suffering from arthritis of the knee who received glucosamine sulfate (1.500 mg. per day for three months) has highlighted remarkable progress in both symptoms control and functionality, and in stopping cartilage lesions.

The result has now been confirmed also by the study conducted in the Czech Republic by Rheumatologist Karel Pavelka, who obtained, on 202 patients, similar results. “Glucosamine sulfate-concludes Reginster- is the first and only drug where two independent, long term studies have demonstrated a real modifying effect on the pathological progression in osteoarthritis”.

“This compound-explain prof. Lucio Rovati , a clinical pharmacologist of Rottapharm-contrary to the non-specified drugs and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (Fans) or pure analgesic, has the precise objective of interacting with some specific processes of the illness, with a positive influence on the symptoms and on the illness”

It is not by chance that OARSI (Osteoarthritis Research Society International) and the European Drug Agency (EMA) classify glucosamine sulfate-the only one of its kind- as a symptom modifying drug, in other words, a drug able to modify osteoarthritis structure.

The results of the molecule’s utilization, discovered by Italian research, have been so promising to merit publication even in a recent issue of Cochrane Review, the prestigious magazine of the Cochrane collaboration which represents a fundamental reference point for the entire scientific community.

“The three year results obtained by Prof. Reginster and Prof. Pavelka are potentially indicative of a long-term benefit (10 to 5 years). This will certainly lead to a general improvement in the patient’s quality of life and will probably help delay things as prosthetic limbs replacement-concludes Rovati-concludes Rovati. International data on the drug’s efficacy and the safety are so promising that glucosamine sulfate could be added on the future issues of the American Guidelines on the fight against Arthritis.