

Drug studies conducted

Russian flu aid sought

By TRICIA BRUNHART

An influenza drug study is being conducted at Texas A&M University to determine whether one or both of two drugs will prevent an outbreak of the Russian flu, said Dr. John M. Quarles Jr., assistant professor in the College of Medicine at Texas A&M.

The drugs amantadine and rimantadine are being studied.

Amantadine is a commercial drug recommended for prevention of the Russian flu in persons at a high risk level for severe diseases.

Rimantadine is a related but still experimental drug reported to be more effective than amantadine.

One reason for conducting the research, Quarles said, is that the Russian flu tends to hit the 18-24 age group that is prevalent on college campuses.

Another reason is that the Russian flu tends to go around a little later in the flu season, which usually ends in early March, Quarles said.

The study was expected to be done next year, but the Russian flu has become more important this year nationwide, he said.

A "double blind technique" is being used in the distribution of the drugs to the volunteers, Quarles said. A record is kept, but the persons who give out the drugs do not know whether the volunteers are getting one of the drugs or a placebo, which contains no drug.

This is done to insure objectivity, said Quarles. If a person knows he is taking a drug, he is more likely to exaggerate any illness symptoms and if he knows he is not taking a drug he is more likely to overlook any symptoms.

The drugs work differently from an influenza vaccine, Quarles said. After taking a vaccine, the body builds antibodies against the disease and they will continue to be effective for a certain length of time.

A drug, however, only helps you when you are taking it. This is beneficial when you are expecting an epidemic, he said, for after 24 hours of taking the drug, you are believed protected and with continued use remain protected from flu infection.

The volunteers are asked to take a capsule in the morning and one at night, said Quarles. If they get sick, they go to Beutel Health Center and usually Dr. Claude Goswick, head of the center, talks with them.

Coswick estimates that approximately 50 people in the program have gotten sick.

People have come in to be checked for illness, but it takes two weeks to be sure if they have the Russian flu, said Quarles. If the symptoms are due to the medicine, the capsules will be stopped.

The participants are also required to give three blood samples; one at the beginning, after six weeks in the study, and two weeks after that. They will also be questioned about any symptoms they experience, he said.

They are required to report weekly for six weeks to keep a record of their symptoms and how regularly they take the capsules.

The volunteers are paid for their participation, Quarles said. They receive \$5 for each blood sample, \$2 for each of the six weekly reports filed, and \$2 for an illness report if they get sick. Most participants should get about \$30, Quarles said.

There are sometimes side effects with these drugs, Quarles said, and these include confusion, anxiety, depression, drowsiness, inability to sleep, shaking, jerky movements, dizziness or an upset stomach. A person can quit the program any time he wants to, he added.

Quarles is restricted from giving out the names of the volunteers because of a clause in the consent form, yet one Corps member said he participated because others were doing it and volunteers were needed.

There are between 450 and 470 people participating in the study which began March 2 and is expected to run until the end of April.

The final results will be out sometime in May, Quarles said.

He speculated that the drugs are not causing any problems, though a small number of people have dropped out.

The research is funded through the National Institute of Health. It is a three-part effort involving Dr. Robert Couch, director of the Influenza Research Center at the Baylor College of Medicine, Goswick, and Quarles.

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