

New hope for progressive MS breakthroughs



Promising clinical trial results and multimillion-dollar grants advance the cause.

by Vicky Uhland



For the more than 1 million people worldwide living with progressive multiple sclerosis, few treatment options exist. But two announcements at the recent European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS) conference give hope that there will soon be exciting breakthroughs in understanding and

treating progressive MS.

First, researchers presented encouraging results from the phase 3 clinical trial for the experimental oral medication siponimod for people with secondary progressive MS. The study involved 1,651 participants who were given either siponimod daily for up to 60 months, or a placebo.

The researchers announced that final results showed that the siponimod group had a 21 percent reduced risk of disability progression compared with the placebo group. The siponimod group also had less brain volume loss, along with reduced MRI-detected brain lesion volume, compared with those on placebo. Finally, relapse rates were significantly lower in those taking siponimod. The therapy was generally well tolerated, and adverse events were comparable to those reported for similar compounds. The serious adverse events reported to be more likely for those taking siponimod included nervous system disorders and infections.

“These results are encouraging—first because they show a modest, positive step forward toward finding treatments for secondary progressive MS, and second, because they reflect growing interest by industry to support critical clinical trials to test treatments for progressive forms of MS, for which there are few treatment options,” says Timothy Coetzee, PhD, chief advocacy, services, and research officer at the National MS Society.

Also announced at theECTRIMS conference: an unprecedented \$14.1 million in Collaborative Network Award grants from the International Progressive MS Alliance. Researchers who the Alliance believes are poised to make crucial breakthroughs in understanding and treating progressive MS receive these grants.

Multiyear grants of \$4.7 million were awarded to international teams working on three projects that are expected to be completed within four years. The projects are:

- Identifying a biomarker to measure disease progression, for use in clinical trials and to help determine treatment for people who don't yet have visible signs of progressive MS.
- Finding compounds or drugs that may help protect nerve cells or promote myelin repair, and conducting a clinical trial of those compounds.
- Identifying the biological processes that control the innate immune response in the central nervous system, and analyzing drugs that can affect this response.

“These new awards are the largest commitment to date by this unprecedented global alliance forged to bring an end to progressive MS,” says Dr. Coetzee, who is a member of the Alliance's scientific steering committee. “The three promising projects are laser-focused on transformative research that will speed the answers we need to treat progressive MS.”

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Learn more about the [International Progressive MS Alliance](#).

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