

Bellarine to be part of trial in beating Ross River virus

Old med has role against illness

HARRISON TIPPET

A TREATMENT for a debilitating mosquito-borne virus will be trialled on the Bellarine after local cases have skyrocketed by 1900 per cent this year.

Paradigm Biopharmaceuticals has announced it will use Barwon Heads as a base for a clinical trial of an almost century-old drug — pentosan polysulphate sodium — to treat Ross River virus.

Almost 200 residents in the Barwon South West region have contracted Ross River virus this year, compared with 10 in the same period last year, Health Department figures show.

Principal investigator and Barwon Health infectious disease specialist James Pollard said the drug, which has been used since the 1940s, may be better placed to treat the virus than painkillers such as aspirin and ibuprofen.

“Used long-term, these can have undesirable side-effects,” Dr Pollard said. “The idea is that PPS can

be an effective therapy that’s better tolerated than other existing medications and treatment options.

“Cases in the Barwon southwest region have been higher than previously in the last few years, and government data shows a spike in the last few years.

“We are doing this research to better understand and prevent transmission of the virus, and until a breakthrough is made, we really need effective therapies to treat people with chronic symptoms.”

Rod Carter was diagnosed with the virus in February, and has almost fully recovered from the “constant aching” it causes.

The Clifton Springs resident, 63, said sufferers would jump at the opportunity to find a cure.

“I wouldn’t want to wish that on my worst enemy, it’s one of the most debilitating things I think I’ve ever known,” Mr Carter said.

“It would have been great to have a cure.

“There are so many people who

suffer in a big way from it.”

The six to 15-week Barwon Heads trial is expected recruit about six participants next month, with results anticipated in the middle of next year.

Paradigm Biopharma chief executive Paul Rennie said the company had been contacted by many sufferers hoping to take part.

“Currently, apart from over-the-counter pain relief medication, there are no other treatments available to those suffering from Ross River virus infections,” Mr Rennie said.

“Paradigm is delighted to be commencing the phase 2 Ross River clinical trial and we hope we have a successful trial and can bring a new treatment to those suffering from Ross River virus infection.”

The clinical trial comes only months after a research study found Ross River virus could be the next mosquito-borne global epidemic.

Ross River virus can cause fever, rash and painful joint inflammation.