

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

WONDER DRUG TO CURE ARTHRITIS

A MIRACLE pill that cures crippling osteoarthritis has been developed by Australian scientists. Patients who have tested the drug, which has the potential to delay or completely eliminate the need for hip or knee replacements, have reported massive reductions in pain. Osteoarthritis affects more than three million people in Australia and costs \$1 billion a year. SUE DUNLEVY REPORTS: PAGE 6

Healed by genius pill

The agony of arthritis reversed by a tablet



Andrew Walker with wife Kylie and kids Cody, 9, Arli, 5, and Leti, 2. Picture: Alex Coppel

EXCLUSIVE

SUE DUNLEVY

NATIONAL HEALTH REPORTER

IT'S the nation's most common cause of chronic pain, leaving millions of sufferers in constant and debilitating discomfort and putting a massive strain on our health system.

But a breakthrough medication discovered by Australian scientists looks set to stop osteoarthritis in its tracks.

In what is being billed as the first blockbuster drug since anti-cholesterol pills, the new treatment has the potential to delay or completely

eliminate the need for hip and knee replacements.

Patients who have trialed the drug Pentosan polysulfate sodium (PPS) have reported a huge reduction in pain and a new lease on life. Although researchers have cautioned that more testing is needed, the drug could have conquered the "last frontier of big diseases with no treatment".

At the moment there is no effective medication for the condition, which is caused by

the thinning of cartilage in joints that results in bones rubbing together, creating stiffness, pain, and difficulty moving. More than three million Australians, including top sports stars, are affected and it is the leading cause of costly joint replacements.

Australian scientist Professor Peter Ghosh and Melbourne company Paradigm Biopharma are behind the breakthrough, discovering that PPS, which has been used

for 70 years to treat blood clots and urinary tract infections in

women, can reduce and even eliminate osteoarthritis pain.

A peer-reviewed case study of an Australian patient, to be published in the journal *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, showed her pain went from eight out of 10 to zero after just six injections of the treatment over three weeks.

If a secondary clinical trial due to start within months confirms these early results,

the drug has the potential to delay or eliminate the need for 75,000 hip and knee replacements a year, saving tens of billions of dollars not just here but around the world.

The discovery was made by rethinking the cause of osteoarthritis, considering that it actually starts in the bone. Dr Jegan Krishnan, who is trialling the medicine, said it was not yet clear why it worked.

“It may have anti-inflammatory activities, it seems addressing the bone marrow lesions gives symptomatic relief,” he said. “By controlling the lesions you reduce the symptoms of the pain.”

Monash University arthritis expert Flavia Cicutini said the results were fantastic but further testing was needed.

“Osteoarthritis is the last frontier of big diseases with no treatment, if this drug works, even if it just slows the progress, you don’t need to cure it, you could change the pattern of the disease,” she said. Ex-AFL star Andrew Walker had tried everything to ease the pain in his knees before being given PPS.

“With Pentosan on board and a full rehab ... program, it has changed my life,” he said.

