

# Paradigm puts Diesel back in the swing

EXCLUSIVE

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HEALTHCARE

AFL legend Greg “Diesel” Williams is back swinging a tennis racquet after movement returned to his knee, thanks to a new treatment for osteoarthritis developed by Australian company Paradigm Biopharmaceuticals using a repurposed drug.

The former Carlton, Sydney Swans and Geelong midfielder told *The Australian* that his pain level had been reduced by up to 90 per cent after the innovative treatment.

The dual Brownlow medallist has been treated by his doctor with Pentosan Polysulfate Sodium (PPS) for osteoarthritis with concurrent bone marrow lesions, which is effectively bone bruising.

After several knee injuries during his AFL career, Williams is just one of several past and present elite sportspeople being treated by their doctors with PPS.

Williams was initially told he would need a knee replacement.

But an article he read on former Carlton player Andrew Walker’s treatment with PPS put the brakes on knee surgery.

“I asked Walker about it and

he got me into a doctor who could get me on a special access scheme,” said Williams, who retired at the end of the 1997 season.

In Australia, injectable PPS for human use is not yet available for sale. It is only available by treating physicians applying for its use in patients via a special access scheme allowed under the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

The drug PPS has been around for about 70 years, having predominantly been used as an anti-coagulant before recently being repurposed by Paradigm.

Paradigm chief executive Paul Rennie said the drug could be used to reduce lesions associated with osteoarthritis, which would

then reduce pain caused by the condition.

Mr Rennie said the use of PPS under the special access scheme started to gain traction as news of its application spread through word-of-mouth in sporting

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AARON FRANCIS

**Former AFL star Greg Williams has avoided knee surgery**

## Diesel back in the swing

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circles in Melbourne, particularly among AFL clubs.

“A Melbourne-based doctor who has elite sportspeople as patients started to recommend the drug to patients under the special access scheme, and he saw a remarkable recovery in patients who hadn’t been able to play,” Mr Rennie said.

PPS is not a steroid or an opioid and is not a prohibited substance in sport, making it also attractive to the US market, where Paradigm hopes to receive regulatory approval by the end of next year.

With the “opioid crisis” being tackled in the US, the regulators are trying to accelerate the approval of non-steroidal and non-opioid-based drugs for the treatment of chronic pain.

Australian-listed Paradigm added that there were several current and past players being treated by AFL doctors with PPS

for both acute and chronic sporting injuries.

The company also highlighted that over the past 12 months about 40 past and present elite sportspeople had been successfully treated with PPS. On average, the patients’ pain scores had reduced by more than 50 per cent.

Williams, who is in his early 50s, started the treatment in October and had two injections weekly for four weeks.

“I now have 80-90 per cent less pain and it no longer hurts when I walk,” he said.

“I also no longer have to take anti-inflammatories or painkillers.”

Case studies of 24 patients with a similar condition to Williams, who were treated by their doctors with PPS under the TGA’s special access scheme, recorded pain reduction of about 83 per cent and improvement of knee function in 80 per cent of all cases treated.