

Researchers May Have Found New Hope for Sickle-Cell Sufferers

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An antidepressant marketed since the 1960s may cure sickle-cell anemia in humans, according to a new study by the University of Michigan Medical School and reported by [the Grio](#).

The drug, tranylcypromine—commonly called TCP and sold as Parnate—will be used to treat adult sickle-cell patients in clinical trials at Wayne State University in Detroit. Depending on trial results, the drug could be considered as an alternative to hydroxyurea, which is the current treatment. Hydroxyurea is a cancer-fighting drug that has a slew of negative side effects and is only moderately effective in about half of sickle-cell sufferers.

Sickle-cell anemia results from a genetic mutation that causes blood cells to harden and become C-shaped. These curved cells can ultimately clog arteries, cause excruciating pain and lead to frequent hospitalizations. An estimated one out of 500 African-American babies are born with sickle-cell disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and nearly one in 12 black people carry the sickle-cell trait. (Those who have sickle-cell trait aren't affected by the disease but can pass the gene for sickle cell to their children.)

Researchers hope that more effective treatment of sickle-cell anemia will help treat sufferers reluctant to seek pain-relieving care. Often, those affected by sickle-cell disease are misunderstood by doctors as recreational drug addicts because of their frequent requests for pain medications.

“Especially in the adult world—even though patients are in a tremendous amount of pain—health care providers will brush them aside,” said Andrew Campell, MD, the director of the pediatric sickle-cell program at the University of Michigan’s C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital.

Though considered less hazardous than hydroxyurea, TCP has its own side effects, ranging from anxiety to worsened depression to uncontrollable bodily shaking. What’s more, combined with foods like red wine and charbroiled steaks, the medication is potentially deadly. But the possibility of using TCP as a new therapy is also viewed as a breakthrough for treating the disease.

Grammy Award-winning rapper Prodigy talked with Real Health about living with sickle-cell anemia. [Click here](#) to watch the exclusive interview.

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