

Carlton doctor to help test experimental knee treatment

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Carlton Football Club doctor Phil Bloom is involved in what is an experimental — but potentially revolutionary — treatment to ease the short and long-term impact of bone bruising on AFL players.

Bloom will help Melbourne biotech company Paradigm Pharmaceuticals in a clinical trial to test pentosan polysulfate sodium, a drug that has been used to ease clotting and migraines but could now help with leg injuries through a series of injections. The company hopes to test the drug on AFL players — which could raise eyebrows at league headquarters.

"It will be a matter of recruiting both general public and AFL players which is conditional on the AFL allowing us to use it," Bloom said.

"They (players) will then be entered into before-and-after MRI scans and pain surveys and disability surveys to determine if it's helping."

Bloom said the company had not yet approached the AFL's chief medical officer, Dr Peter Harcourt.

"The normal process is, you need to put in a written application to use a medication that is under a trial — that's their (AFL) new rules — and then present all the evidence to the AFL, and they will say whether they are happy to do that," he said.

The AFL has tightened its medical protocols in wake of the Essendon supplements saga, where the players involved still cannot prove exactly what peptides they were given.

Paradigm Pharmaceuticals will need to provide extensive details for the AFL to allow any players to be tested, or for the drug to eventually be used as accepted treatment.

Bloom said there were no specific treatments for bone bruising, which can lead to knee reconstructions and, in the long term, osteoarthritis.

"The main treatment is immobilisation and rest, pain-killers, sometimes anti-inflammatories are used — none are particularly effective," Bloom said.

"The research is showing that these bone bruises are the precursors to damage to the cartilage, which in the short term causes symptoms of its own, but later arthritis.

"We mostly see the knee joints and hip joints, and to a lesser extent the ankles."

Bloom said early studies overseas of the symptoms and long-term impact of the drug were "promising". The local testing is expected to begin soon after the company floats on the stock exchange next month.

"Hopefully, the trials may be productive. There is no guarantee it will work but if it does there is a lot of promise," he said.

Paradigm Pharmaceuticals chief executive Paul Rennie, a former SANFL player, had trialled the drug on himself and said he was now pain-free. He said the subcutaneous injection process would involve twice weekly injections over three weeks.

Rennie said Melbourne Storm chief medical officer Ruben Branson would also help with the trials.

"There are a number of AFL doctors that do want to participate in the clinical trial. As I said, we'll be looking at players with bone bruising as detected by MRI, then they will be treated," he said.

"I hope it's going to be the start ... for the footballers' sake that if they get these injuries, and concussion is another one, they are just starting to see ... they are having problems later in life. Hopefully these produce better outcomes for athletes later in life."

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