Pharmacogenetic Treatment with Anti-Glutaminergic Agents for Comorbid PTSD & AUD

Background

A great many individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experience alcoholism. PTSD begins with the experience of a traumatic life event such as war zone exposure, physical or sexual assault or rape, serious accidents, child sexual or physical abuse, or natural disasters. This is followed by symptoms including re-experiencing such as “flashbacks”, avoiding things that remind one of what happened, and negative thoughts and emotions. Many people with PTSD find themselves drinking alcohol to cope with these symptoms; for many, drinking may increase to the point of disorder. While PTSD and alcoholism each present challenges for the individuals who experience them, they are even more difficult to overcome when they occur together. In fact, having both alcoholism and PTSD is associated with more severe symptoms, higher rates of social and medical problems, higher relapse rates, and poorer treatment outcome.

Identifying effective treatments for PTSD and alcoholism is a public health priority. This is especially critical for military service members and veterans, for whom the combination of PTSD and alcoholism has been referred to as “a public health crisis”. Recently, experts in the field have stressed the need for integrated treatments that target both PTSD and AUD rather than either one alone. The benefit of this approach is supported by surveys of individuals with both conditions who report a connection between PTSD symptoms and substance use and have expressed interest in treatments that target them at the same time.

Goals of the Study

This 5-year study will investigate the use of the medication called pregabalin -- traditionally used to manage epilepsy and anxiety -- to treat the co-occurring disorders of alcoholism and PTSD. The medication is promising: not only does it help to regulate over-active neurotransmitters, but it’s also less addictive than many medications. The study is open to men and women ages 18 and older and of African American ancestry who are drinking heavily and have experienced trauma in their lives. All participants also receive weekly (for 12 weeks) supportive discussions about drinking and setting reduction goals with members of our study team. Participation is confidential and participants are compensated for their time and effort. Transportation is available if needed.

Importance of the Study

This study is testing a treatment to address PTSD and alcoholism at the same time. Having a safe and effective medication to offer people who experience these conditions will pave the way for people to feel better, have meaningful relationships, and achieve their goals. We are focusing this study on African Americans, a group that historically has been excluded from biomedical research. We are recruiting a large sample of individuals who have experienced diverse types of traumas in order to conduct the study in real-world conditions that match the experiences of individuals with PTSD and alcoholism. Many people in Maryland communities may themselves experience, or know people who experience, problems with PTSD and alcoholism and be interested in contributing to this important research.

Find out More

To learn more about the study, visit our website at http://www.rethinkyourdrinking.org/. The study is being conducted by Dr. Melanie Bennett (https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/profiles/Bennett-Melanie/) and her team at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Catonsville, MD. For persons who are interested in learning if they are eligible to participate, please contact the study team by phone at (410) 402-6425 or via email at rethinkyourdrinking@som.umaryland.edu.