

# New Cuban pharmaceuticals presented

Nuria Barbosa León (Text & photos)

• THE prevalence of skin cancer in Cuba and the development of therapeutic injectibles to treat allergies caused by dust mites, were among issues discussed during several international conferences on dermatology and allergies, taking place in Havana's International Conference Center, October 4-7.

Dr. Olaine Gray Lovio explained to the press, prior to the events, that malignant growths on the skin are among the most prevalent cancers on the island, given the tropical climate and strong solar radiation during a large part of the day.

Every year in Cuba, approximately 8,000 cases of this disease, described as basal or squamous cell carcinoma or melanoma, are diagnosed, causing some 400 deaths. Emphasis is therefore being placed on reducing direct exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays, especially in the first 20 years of life.

Dr. Gray, head of Dermatology Services at the Manuel Fajardo University Hospital and coordinator of the Ministry of Public Health's skin cancer program, advises avoiding the sun during the hours of greatest intensity, between 10:00am and 5:00pm; wearing clothes of pastel colors that almost entirely cover the skin; using hats and parasols to protect the face; and applying sunscreen every three or four hours during the day.

She likewise called for efforts to plant trees along city streets to provide shade in public areas, and building awareness within the population that interior lighting can also damage the skin if fixtures are not covered with protective sheeting.

Presented during the Dermatology Congress were positive results attained in the treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases that damage the skin, and of leprosy, which has not considered a health problem in Cuba since 1993. Time was also allotted to discuss dermatological pathologies in children and older adults.

On the first day of the gathering, specialty courses were offered participants, followed by the convening of the 10th Cuban National Dermatology Congress; the First Encounter of Latin American, Caribbean, and African Dermatologist

Trained in Cuba; the 6th Symposium of the Ibero-Latin American Academy of Dermatology's Youth Chapter; the 4th International Seminar presented by the Placental Histotherapy Center; and the 6th National Sobeida Lovio Memorial Skin Cancer Day.

A Exhibition Fair was held simultaneously, presenting products created in Cuban and international laboratories, both pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, with the country's leaders in the sector on hand. Among these were the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, the Placental Histotherapy Center, and the National Clinical Trials Center, among others.

One of the products attracting the most attention was Heberferon for the treatment of basal cell carcinoma, which has effectively reduced advanced growths in 450 Cuban patients, including those which are difficult to surgically access, such as the inner corner of the eye, nasal passages, and others on the face.

Likewise discussed in the 14th Central American and Caribbean Allergy Congress was use of the injectible medication Valergen to address ailments, mostly respiratory, caused by dust mites. The drug is registered in Cuba and results of initial investigations have been published.

Dr. Raúl Lázaro Castro Almarales, in charge of several of the clinical trials conducted with Valergen, stated, "Our research made clear that the product is safe and effective. Only 0.5% of patients treated experienced adverse reactions, while internationally the norm is to accept up to 2% of the total focus group."

The medication is available by prescription from family doctors in the country's network of neighborhood clinics, and can be administered to children and adults alike,



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Dr. Raúl Lázaro Castro Almarales reported that clinical trials have shown Valergen to be effective and safe in treating allergies caused by dust mites.

either injected or taken sublingually, which is the more popular.

Dr. Castro clarified, "We are currently investigating another variant of the drug with the goal of reducing the number of yearly doses required. At this time, we're administering about 20 and we would like to reduce that to three."

The gathering of allergy experts was convened under the banner of "Integrating sciences for a future without allergies," and simultaneously taking place was the 5th Ibero-American Encounter and the 9th National Congress of the specialty.

A new component of the series of meetings usually held at the same time was a training course sponsored by the World Allergy Organization.

The Congress included discussions of a variety of issues such as the epidemiology of allergic ailments; airborne allergens and air quality; allergic inflammation; basic and clinical immunology; rhinitis, sinusitis, and allergic eye reactions; in addition to education and quality of life issues associated with allergies.

Both international events provided an opportunity for academic exchanges to discuss new scientific and pharmaceutical developments, latest technology, and novel experiences acquired in dermatology and the treatment of allergies. •

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