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## European research consortium initiates clinical trial using innovative eye drop treatment to combat diabetic retinopathy

A clinical trial to evaluate a new therapeutic treatment using eye drops to treat the early stages of diabetic retinopathy will start today, researchers announced. A group of leading European ophthalmologists, endocrinologists and researchers who have gathered under EUROCONDOR, the European Consortium on the early treatment of diabetic retinopathy, will conduct the clinical trial in 11 clinical centres across the EU, members of EVICR.net – the European Vision Institute Clinical Research Network, a network of European Ophthalmology Clinical Research Sites with high standards of quality.

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye disease that occurs in people living with diabetes. It involves changes in the tiny blood vessels that nourish the retina at the back of the eye which can ultimately lead to severe loss of vision or even blindness. Today, diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of preventable blindness among working-age individuals in developed countries.

Along with the human suffering from this devastating complication comes an increasingly heavy economic burden: healthcare costs for patients with diabetic retinopathy are almost double that of patients without the complication.

There is growing evidence to suggest that retinal neurodegeneration plays an important role in the onset of diabetic retinopathy. With this in mind, EUROCONDOR will conduct a controlled phase II and III clinical trial to assess whether therapeutic strategies based on neuroprotection are effective not only in preventing or arresting retinal neurodegeneration but also in preventing the development and progression of the early stages of diabetic retinopathy.

The trial will evaluate the safety and effectiveness of a new therapeutic eye drop treatment based on two neuroprotective drugs: somatostatin (a peptide hormone) and brimonidine (a drug currently used to treat glaucoma).

“Until recently, the use of eye drops has not been considered an appropriate route for the administration of drugs in the early treatment of this complication because of the general assumption that they do not reach the retina”, comments Dr Rafael Simó, Director of Diabetes Research and Metabolism Unit at VHIR (Hospital Universitari de la Vall d’Hebrón – Institut de Recerca) and coordinator of the EUROCONDOR project. “However, recent studies show that many drugs are able to reach the retina in effective concentrations.”

These findings mean that neuroprotective drugs administered through eye drops have the potential to open up a new strategy to treat the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. Positive outcomes for the EUROCONDOR project could have a considerable impact on prevention, placing neurodegeneration as a new target for early detection of diabetic retinopathy in people with diabetes.

“The EUROCONDOR project is an important step in the development of a new, non-invasive treatment for this devastating complication of diabetes, given early in the disease. We also hope that the findings of this research will pave the way for new screening systems that will allow us to diagnose diabetic retinopathy at earlier stages, which in turn would allow us to provide better care for our patients”, comments Prof. Cunha-Vaz, Coordinating Investigator of the Clinical Trial.

The EUROCONDOR project, which is funded by the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Union, began in March 2012 and is scheduled to be completed in February 2016.

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**Notes to editors:**

EUROCONDOR is a collaborative project funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme. The project is coordinated by the Fundació Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebrón - Institut de Recerca (VHIR). The EUROCONDOR consortium includes 17 partners across Europe, of which 11 clinical centres from EVICR.net that will recruit patients to carry out the trial.

EVICR.net is a disease-oriented network in Ophthalmology, with 79 Clinical Site members. The Headquarters and Coordinating Centre are located in AIBILI, Coimbra, Portugal.

For the full list of project partners, go to [www.eurocondor.eu/partners](http://www.eurocondor.eu/partners)

For more information about EUROCONDOR, visit [www.eurocondor.eu](http://www.eurocondor.eu)

For more information about EVICR.net, visit [www.evicr.net](http://www.evicr.net)

For more information on the EU's 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, go to <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7>

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