Prevention of diabetic maculopathy: Trial of oral medication begins

The trial of a potential new treatment for the early stages of diabetic maculopathy has been launched at a Liverpool hospital.

A 63-year-old Merseyside man has become the first person in the world to receive a trial dose of danegaptide for the treatment of diabetic macular oedema. Steve Gotts, who has had diabetes for over 30 years, received his first dose at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital.

Macular oedema is a common complication of diabetes. High glucose levels can damage the blood vessels near the macula, resulting in fluid or protein leaking onto the macula.

The macula is the central part of the retina that enables people to see fine detail, so the effects of maculopathy can be devastating. In the UK, most patients with type 1 diabetes and nearly two thirds of people with type 2 diabetes will have signs of retinal damage within 20 years of diagnosis.

Intravitreally administered treatments are available for people with late-stage retinopathy, but there are few options for those in the early or moderate stages of the condition. Danegaptide is an oral therapy designed to target these earlier disease processes in those at risk of vision loss and blindness.

Steve is one of 24 participants in a worldwide, open-label, dose-escalating trial investigating the safety, tolerability, pharmacokinetics and early signs of biological activity among people with diabetic macular oedema. Before entering the trial, the hospital helped him to improve his glycaemic control, which he had struggled with for years.

Participants will take the medication for a month, after which they will be closely monitored by clinical teams to ensure that they continue to react well.

If the trial is successful, the investigators hope that oral danegaptide will become an early treatment option for the condition, sparing people from later eye injections later and improving eyesight outcomes in people with diabetes. ■