

Himalayan plant may hold key to arthritis cure

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NEW DELHI: A Himalayan plant, commonly used in Ayurvedic medicines, may hold the key to developing a new drug against rheumatoid arthritis—one of the commonest illnesses affecting the elderly.

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM), Jammu, have found a molecule with anti-arthritic properties in the plant locally known as patal-bheda (*Bergenia ciliata*). Three years of laboratory research suggests that the drug candidate is promising.

“It works in two ways. First, it prevents inflammation, and second, it reduces pain. We will be approaching the Drugs



Bergenia ciliata

Controller General of India seeking permission to list it as an investigational new drug, and conduct clinical trials,” IIIM director Ram Vishwakarma told *Deccan Herald*.

The scientists already have filed a patent application for the new molecule in the US.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the commonest age-related

chronic disease, characterised by morning stiffness and inflammation of the joints. It can lead to long-term joint damage, resulting in chronic pain and loss of joint function, leading to disability.

There is hardly any cure for the debilitating disease. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved four medicines, but all of them come with a “Black Box Warning” because of their serious side-effects, like osteoporosis, weight gain, tuberculosis and increased susceptibility to infections. In contrast, the Indian molecule has been found to be safe in animal studies.

“Even a dosage of 2 gm per kg body weight has been found safe,” said Vishwakarma.

Bergenia ciliata has been

used for centuries in Ayurvedic medicine to treat kidney and bladder stones, piles and a few other ailments.

Taking a cue from the traditional knowledge, IIIM scientists synthesised a large number of molecules from a unique natural product isolated from this plant. They found that one of these compounds, IS-01246, displayed excellent results in reducing inflammation and rheumatoid arthritis in laboratory studies and animal models.

The identified lead compound demonstrates promise for the development of a next-generation anti-arthritic drug, the scientists wrote in the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*.

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