In fall 2020, the Hope for Depression Research Foundation began a clinical trial of tianeptine, which represents a brand new category of antidepressant.  The trial is underway at Columbia University and Mount Sinai Medical Center, and at this writing shows early promising results.

The trial is focused on patients who are treatment-resistant -- they have not responded to the conventional medications available today.  The scientists in our Depression Task Force (DTF) are testing the hypothesis that a certain profile of these patients will respond dramatically to tianeptine because of their specific brain chemistry . These patients will have two evident symptoms: 1) they have a behavioral symptom known as rejection sensitivity, or a blunted ability to cope with the psychosocial stress of rejection (i.e. losing a job or promotion, ending a relationship) and 2) they have disrupted activity in a specific rejection and pain circuit in the brain, as detected by a brain scan.

The subjects are being give tianeptine because this compound has a unique ability -- ***discovered by DTF scientists*** -- to repair deficits in the rejection and pain circuit through targeted molecular action.  The DTF believes that depression will remit as the physical circuit is repaired, and it’s also possible that the behavioral symptom of hyper-sensitivity to rejection will be alleviated.

By repairing circuit deficits at a fine-tuned location, tianeptine may finally help patients where other medications have failed.  If the trial is successful, it will lead to a new precision medicine approach to depression that will greatly increase response rates by pairing patients with the right treatment for their underlying biology.

Clinical trials began October 2020 and patient recruitment has been extended to 2023 to reach a study goal of 75 patients.   Early results are extremely encouraging, and the teams are actively recruiting patients to continue the work.  The study seeks men and women ages 21-60 who have not responded to standard antidepressant medication.

If you are interested in learning more about the study or volunteering as a subject, please contact Nicolas Cimino at nicolas.cimino@nyspi.columbia.edu or Amelia Karim at  amelia.karim@mssm.edu. ◊LOUISA BENTON