

NEW DRUG PERFORMING BETTER

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Following the largest worldwide trial involving patients with heart failure, a new drug was approved by the Health Sciences Authority last month, pharmaceutical giant Novartis announced yesterday.

The new drug for heart failure, Entresto, is available only at the National Heart Centre for now.

But work is in progress to make it available in other hospitals by the end of this month, said Novartis spokesman Mathew Thomas.

Compared to enalapril, a drug commonly prescribed for heart failure, trial results showed Entresto reduces the risk of death from cardiovascular causes by 20 per cent and heart failure hospitalisations by 21 per cent, said Novartis.

It works by blocking a hormone system that increases the heart's workload and delaying the degradation of a protein that helps to relieve stress on the heart.

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The trial involved 8,442 patients, of whom 32 were from Singapore.

Originally planned to span three years, the trial ended after 27 months when results showed the drug to significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular death.

National lead investigator of the trial, Dr Raymond Wong, senior consultant for the department of cardiology at National University Heart Centre, Singapore, said: "Heart failure is a common condition, affecting the young and old. In Singapore, there are more than 6,000 hospital admissions (in 2015) for heart failure.

"The diagnostic and treatment process can be complex and costly to both the healthcare system as well as the individuals.

"Hence, advancement of heart failure therapy, as well as cost-effective management of the chronic disease, is a priority in many countries."

Entresto will be more expensive than enalapril, said Mr Thomas.

A check with three hospitals revealed the price of a 10mg pill of enalapril to range between 11 and 21 cents.

The trial's lead investigator at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Dr Ong Hean Yee, senior consultant and head of the cardiology department, said: "Based on the results of the trial, I will prescribe the drug to my patients."