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Ardian's Device Zaps Kidney Nerves to Reduce Blood Pressure

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By David Olmos and Michelle Fay Cortez

Nov. 17 (Bloomberg) -- Ardian Inc., the closely held company developing hypertension therapies, reduced high blood pressure with its device that used radio waves to destroy nerves near the kidney, a novel therapy effective in patients who didn't respond well to other treatments.

In a study of 106 patients with high blood pressure, those who got the nerve-destroying procedure had their systolic blood pressure drop to an average of 146/84 from a baseline of 178/96, the researchers reported today at the American Heart Association meeting in Chicago. The study also was published today in the Lancet medical journal.

Ardian, based in Mountain View, California, received approval from regulators in Europe to sell the device as a hypertension treatment. The company plans to begin a 300-patient trial in the U.S. in early 2011, said Andrew Cleeland, Ardian's chief executive officer, in an interview.

"These results are pretty dramatic," said Anthony DeMaria, editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American College of Cardiology. "These are people in whom hypertension is hard to control and often impossible. We have an intervention that can substantially lower the blood pressure and in a substantial minority even normalize it."

Almost one-third of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, which strains the heart and can damage the arteries and organs. Medical guidelines recommend keeping blood pressure about 120/80 millimeters of mercury, or mmHg. The top number reflects the systolic pressure, measured when the heart contracts. The bottom number is the diastolic pressure, when the heart is filling with blood.

No Medications

Patients in the study hadn't controlled their blood pressure by medications or changes in diet and exercise habits, said Murray Esler, one of the study's researchers from Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, Australia, in an interview. Esler is a paid consultant to Ardian.

The findings need to be confirmed in larger studies to see if the blood pressure benefit persists over time, Esler said. The study found no serious side effects related to the device or the procedure, he said.

The procedure uses a catheter, or a tiny wire, inserted through the leg into an artery near the kidneys, Esler said. The catheter emits high-frequency radiowaves to destroy nerves near the kidney that have been linked to high blood pressure. The procedure takes about 40 minutes for each kidney and requires a one-night hospital stay, he said.

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