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**DR AMAL** el-Beshlawi (1st L) announces launching a new drug to the treatment of thalassemia during a press conference held recently in Cairo.

### New way to take thalassemia drug

**THE** Egyptian Thalassemia Association recently held a Cairo press conference to announce the launching of a new drug known as Deferasirox for the treatment of thalassemia. It is taken at the rate of one tablet daily. A total of five to nine per cent of the country's population can use this drug.

Dr Amal el-Beshlawi, Professor of Paediatrics and Haematology, Abu Riesha University Hospital, said that anaemia is associated with a shortage of iron in the body, but the problem with thalassemia lies in the accumulation of iron in the body as a result of blood transfusions over a long period of time.

Dr el-Beshlawi said that the disease has more than one degree of severity.

There are carriers of the disease who have a small percentage of anaemia which does not require treatment. But severe anaemia can appear in a child in the first year of his life, or in the first six months of his life and the disease increases gradually. So the only treatment for this case is blood transfusion.

This then leads to an accumulation of iron in the organs of the body, the liver, heart, pancreas and the pituitary gland. The

patient thereafter is threatened with failure of these organs due to iron accumulation. So he or she needs a medicine to get the excess iron out of the body.

Dr Mona Hamdi, Professor of Haematology, said the new drug was produced in the shape of an easy tablet to swallow that is taken just once daily. It compares well with the old medicine which was based on an injection under the skin through a pump working from eight to 12 hours five days a week.

According to Sherif Amin, the representative of **Novartis**, the company is keen on improving the life of people with thalassemia.

He said that Deferasirox reduces the level of iron, in addition to being easy to take. The new drug, he said, is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

To limit the spread of thalassemia, Dr Naglaa Shahin consultant in Haematology, stressed the importance of raising community awareness of the need for pre-marital tests. She praised the role played by the health insurance system in helping patients with thalassemia and supplying them with the necessary drugs, blood transfusion services and outstanding medical care.