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NASA lands in city as it looks to take next giant leap

NASA astronauts and scientists dropped into the University of Birmingham to see how cutting edge medicines could one day help mankind make it to Mars.

The team was in town to discuss how drug discoveries in NHS patients could reduce brain pressure during space travel.

The American space agency's next big goal is a Mars mission, but microgravity can have significant physiological effects on the body and can lead to pressure on the brain that can cause visual impairment.

Astronauts would spend months in almost zero gravity travelling to and from the Red Planet, so NASA's scientists need to find a solution.

The delegation from NASA, including its chief health officer Dr James Polk, has held talks with Dr Alex Sinclair and her research group at the University of Birmingham to learn more about their research into Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension (IIH), which has similar

effects on the body as the brain pressure caused by space travel.

Dr Sinclair is also a consultant neurologist at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, leading one of the world's largest IIH clinical services based at the QE Hospital.

Dr Sinclair and her team are now world-leading experts in brain pressure and their recent research showed that treating an animal model with a drug called Exenatide can reduce intracranial pressure. A clinical trial in patients is under way.

Dr Sinclair said: "NASA scientists are trying to find a solution to space flight raised brain pressure which could be problematic for human Mars exploration.

"We were delighted to wel-

come the NASA team to the University of Birmingham to exchange observations and ideas.

"Ultimately our new drug discovery may be the solution

to reducing brain pressure during space flight.

"We hope this visit will lead to research in collaboration with NASA to help address this important issue that will push the boundaries of human exploration forward to Mars."

The NASA delegation, which included Dr Terrance Taddeo, Johnson Space Centre Chief Medical Officer; Dr Mike Barratt, Physician and Astronaut; and Dr Victor Schneider, Physician Liaison to the NASA Human Research Programme, spent two days at the University last week.

Professor David Adams, Head of the University of Birmingham's College of Medical and Dental Sciences, said: "We were thrilled to welcome the NASA delegation.

"This visit highlights how, by enabling integrated, multidisciplinary working, BHP helps bring about answers to complex healthcare issues for the direct benefit of people worldwide and even beyond."

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> NASA's chief health officer Dr James Polk, NASA astronaut Dr Mike Barratt, University of Birmingham's Dr Alex Sinclair and her researcher in the University of Birmingham lab