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Flu treatment hope in WWII medication

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An anti-inflammatory drug used during World War II has emerged as a potential new flu treatment that could be used at any stage of the illness.

Australian researchers have found two existing medications — one once used to prolong the life of penicillin and now called on to treat gout, and other an experimental anti-arthritis treatment — could be key to reducing flu-related deaths.

Co-lead researcher Dr Michelle Tate, from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne, said it was not the virus itself that was deadly, but the overreaction of the immune system that caused tissue and organ damage.

“The flu virus has become resistant to antivirals, and you have to take them within the first couple of days of getting sick,” she said. “People typically present to hospital five days after they get sick and, apart

from oxygen and supportive care, there are no actual treatments for them at this point.”

Three years ago the Hudson team uncovered a key player in what triggers “hyper-inflammation” of the immune system in response to flu. The next step was to take two drugs that act on this protein and test them in mice.

Both drugs were able to dampen the immune system — at all stages of influenza — so the animal could fight off infection.