

Breakthrough

hope: Research into use of an antibiotic may yet help young Billy. Picture: JAY TOWN



Smiling through the pain

BILLY Davis is the little boy who almost never stops laughing.

A smile rarely leaves the seven-year-old's face, no matter what.

Mum Jo Davis said: "He's smiling most of the time — he has to be really in pain or hurt not to."

Even when he's sick the grin stays, masking his illness — when he had pneumonia his family did not know until his lung collapsed.

The Montrose youngster

Marianne Betts
health reporter

has a rare neurological disorder called Angelman syndrome, but along with the laughter comes a down side. Billy's speech is limited to the odd word — "mum", "dad" or "no", his movements are unco-ordinated and he suffers seizures.

But hope is on the horizon, with scientists possibly on the brink of developing the first

treatment for the condition. One day there could even be a cure.

The hope for treatment lies in the results of human trials in the US of the antibiotic minocycline, used to treat acne, which will be announced in December.

"With this treatment they're hoping it will help with a bit of everything — movement, balance, seizures, cognitive skills," Ms Davis said.

"He's a lovely boy most

of the time, and we love him for who he is, but anything that will help to improve his quality of life would be great.

"He is mostly a very happy, cheeky and feisty little boy who brings a lot of joy to people around him."

Billy was diagnosed with the disorder, which is caused by the loss of function of a gene in the brain, at 22 months old.

Net link: www.cureangelman.org.au

Questions

Answer true or false to the following

1. Billy Davis is happy most of the time. T F
2. Many people suffer from Billy's disease T F
3. In spite of being unwell, Billy always has a lot to say T F
4. Scientists may soon have a cure for the disorder T F
5. The disease is caused by a gene malfunction in the brain T F
6. What can we all learn from Billy?
