



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

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Cancer study to ease plight of people at advanced stages of illness

Patients with advanced cancer are to test a therapy aimed at reducing their symptoms and improving quality of life.

The treatment – called bermekimab – could help with improving outcomes in cancer, including reducing symptoms such as weight loss and decreased mobility.

Researchers have been awarded almost £1 million from the Medical Research Council (MRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, to enable the study, which will begin recruiting patients later this year.

The team led by the University of Edinburgh are working with the US-based biotechnology company XBiotech, which developed the therapy.

Bermekimab works by blocking a molecule of the immune system called IL-1alpha, which causes inflammation and pain. It is already being tested as a treatment for patients with colorectal cancer.

The new trial aims to check if the treatment – a form of immunotherapy – offers any benefit for patients with advanced lung, pancreatic or ovarian cancer.

Patients will be recruited to five sites across the UK – Edinburgh Cancer Centre, the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre, Velindre Cancer Centre in Cardiff, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust in London.

As cancer advances, it can hijack the immune system causing life-altering physical symptoms for patients. These include loss of appetite and weight loss, muscle loss and fatigue, which have a significant impact on daily life.

The trial has been developed in conjunction with the UK's National Cancer Research Institute and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Cancer and Nutrition Collaboration.

Dr Barry Laird, Senior Lecturer in Palliative Medicine at the University of Edinburgh's MRC Institute of Genetics & Molecular Medicine, is leading the trial. He said: "Using immunotherapy to target the cause of symptoms in cancer is a new approach. If successful, it has the potential to improve quality of life for people with advanced cancer."

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President and Chief Executive Officer of XBiotech John Simard welcomed the trial and said the company is eager to provide bermekimab to patients with advanced cancer through supporting this trial. He added: “Bermekimab is able to target a crucial inflammatory process that enables tumours to grow, spread and disrupt normal organ function to cause harm.”

Dr Steve Wootton, a nutrition expert at the University of Southampton and Deputy Chair of the NIHR Cancer and Nutrition Collaboration, said the study will allow them to test theories about how cancer leads to severe malnutrition and weight loss in many people. He added that it could open up new hope for patients with advancing cancer, allowing them to lead more active lives with their families.

Chair of the National Cancer Research Institute’s Supportive Care Clinical Studies Group Professor Sam H Ahmedzai described the study as a “radical new approach”. He said it could improve patients’ daily living.

Edinburgh Innovations, the University of Edinburgh’s commercialisation service, supported the University team in development of the project including liaising with XBiotech, project partners and the MRC to fund the study.

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