

New look at cancer care

An alternative approach has been devised for patients referred for palliative treatment, says ADRIAN LEE

EVERY year 150,000 cancer patients in the UK are told that they have reached the end of the conventional treatment line. For these patients and their families the discovery that radiotherapy and chemotherapy drugs are no longer viable is devastating.

However a clinic opening this month in London will offer another option.

The Care Oncology Clinic takes a new approach to treating all late stage cancers by using everyday drugs which were originally designed to combat other conditions.

Some studies have shown that statins (for lowering cholesterol) and anti-diabetes drugs can have an impact on cancer cells which require blood sugars and fat to grow.

It is thought that giving cancer patients a combination of these drugs could halt or slow the growth of cancer cells.

Although it is not claimed to be a cure, the aim is to allow patients who have been given a terminal diagnosis to both survive longer and have a better quality of life.

The treatment could be suitable for seven out of 10 patients with all types of cancer including those who have allergic reactions to conventional cancer drugs. Founder of the clinic Greg Stoloff says: "It will only be offered when no alternatives are available and patients have been referred for palliative care.

"At present this group has very few options and you hear disturbing stories about people flying abroad in search of treatments costing thousands of pounds."

The treatment, which is only available privately, is relatively inexpensive because it relies on proven, low-cost drugs which are already licensed.

Over the next few years the clinic, which can treat up to 2,000 patients, will also monitor the impact of this approach to cancer.

All patients will receive the same drugs and dose while the typical cost per person for consultant fees and a course of treatment will be about £800.

"Cancer cells behave in a different way to normal cells in the body and are very sensitive to cholesterol and sugar levels and require large volumes of both," explains Mr Stoloff.

"By reducing the levels using low-cost drugs which are already widely available, you can slow the growth of cancer cells without harming surrounding healthy cells. It is a new approach but there is good evidence to support it."



BATTLING ALL THE WAY: Small studies suggest life expectancy may be extended by 18 months

Small studies suggest life expectancy may be extended by 18 months when compared with conventional palliative care.

The treatment evolved from research which indicates that diabetes patients who are treated with a common drug called metformin are less likely to develop cancer.

Other research suggests that patients taking statins to lower cholesterol are also less likely to suffer cancers.

"Millions of people are already taking these drugs," adds Mr Stoloff.

"We will only use them in dosages that have already been approved. It is the combination of drugs that is important."

Professor Justin Stebbing, lead consultant at the Care Oncology Clinic and a cancer consultant at Imperial College, London, believes that this type of approach to treating the disease will become mainstream in future.

"It is not a radical treatment but there will be medical professionals who oppose it because you often encounter those who are stuck in their ways," he says.

"The only way to convince people is to collect data. It is a new way of looking at **cancer** but it has the potential to do enormous good.

"As an oncologist my aim is to significantly improve quantity and quality of life and I believe we can do both with this treatment.

"It is a beautifully simple approach for people who have exhausted other avenues but are still determined to fight their cancer."

● For more information on the Care Oncology Clinic visit careoncologyclinic.com or call 020 7153 6601.