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Petition against plans to cut the cancer drug reached 100.000 signatures

Petition to reintroduce a vital drug on the funding list to treat patients with tumour has reached 100.000 signatures.

Victoria Janes together with Richard Basset, who is PAWS - GIST cancer diagnosis, called the government on the decision to reinstate the drug Regorafenib on the Cancer Drug Fund (CDF) in January. The number of signatures collected today means that the proposal will luckily soon be debated in the House of Commons.

The drug is used as a treatment for people with advanced Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumour (GIST). £4500 is the sum of money that a patient spends monthly for Regorafenib. The campaign was helped by some charities such as the GIST cancer charity founded in 2009.

Janes explained: "The petition reaching 100.000 signatures means the issue will be discussed in Parliament. We are confident that when this happens the errors associated with the decision will be clear for all to see, and Regorafenib reinstated on the CDF."

According to some doctors there has been a mistake in the classification of the tumour. GIST has been classified as a bowel cancer, a more common cancer. GIST is, doctors say, a rare type of cancer that affects the digestive system with between 600 to 1000 new diagnoses every year in the UK.

Regorafenib is mainly used to treat patients with advanced GIST when a surgical remotion is not possible. The drug does not cure GIST but in many cases it stops the disease growing, statistics have showed. Presently there is no cure for inoperable GIST diagnosis.

Professor Ian Judson, Chair of the GIST Support UK Medical Advisor Board, has commented:" It is a very useful drug and for some patients I have little doubt that it has represented an improvement in both quality and quantity of life."

Judson underlined that his personal experience in 20 patients has seen "a median progression-free survival of 9.4 months and overall survival of 12.2 months, including activity against some particularly difficult to treat cases."

Jayne Bressington, Vice Chair GIST support UK, said that this is an important appeal to support. She explained:" The process is under way now and because the process has been gone to appeal the drug has been kept on the Cancer Drug Fund till the appeal's process is concluded."

Bressington added that GIST cancer charity is hoping that CDF will eventually identify that this is an important case to be held from GIST patients. She stressed the fact that they have not heard back from Cancer Drug Fund yet and that this presumably may take a few weeks.

The Vice Chair also pointed out that Regorafenib is a "huge benefit" for GIST patients and that the appeal have been sent from doctors and pharmacists companies too. She commented that even if the drug does not cure GIST, it enables patients to live longer and that the extra time could be important to find other curative treatments.

Janes claimed that "the petition reaching 100.000 signatures is a clear message that people are strongly against cuts to life-saving medical treatments.". She also thanked who support her appeal and she defined her petition and campaign as a way to "enable the voices of the patients to be heard".

A GIST patient interviewed by The Independent who expressed the desire of being anonymous said "As GIST is such a rare form of cancer bringing the devastating impacts of this decision to the attention of the government is difficult". She also defined the CDF's decision a "truth hard to bear" for patients who fight "with a battle that we did not choose".

CDF's decision Summary released on January 2015 shows that "The CDF panel considered the clinical benefits of Reforafenib (…) in non-resectable or metastatic gastrointestinal stromal tumours to offer sufficient clinical benefit to potentially remain included in the CDF".

Although the Cancer Drug Fund underlined that the number of patients treated with this drug is small, less than 100 patients per year, the cost banding system for rare prescriptions will not include Regorafenib as the drug already had a European approved indication for the more common bowel tumour.

This is a crucial aspect as the CDF panel concluded that "Regorafenib had a potential funding stream from its licensed use in bowel cancer and thus did not fulfil the condition for use of the scoring system for very rare indications".

Reforafenib, the summary points out, was also not approved by NICE, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Additionally, the Cancer Drugs Fund justified its decision explaining that other cuts in NHS services would have been necessary if they had kept the drug on its list.

Further issues concerning the drug have been identified by Bayer, the German pharmaceutical company leader in the drug production. On the 5th of March the company announced to have identified a lack in patient recruitment.

Bayer has confirmed the suspension of the Phase III trial with Regorafenib. During a press release Dr. Joerg Moller, Member of the Bayer Healthcare Executive Committee, said "We are disappointed that the extensive measures to increase recruitment did not have the desired outcome." However, Moller has reassured that the pharmaceutical company will keep evaluating the drug.

18 March 2015 - for NEWS TODAY, Greta Ruffino.