

Outrage as NHS cuts funding for dozens of cancer drugs

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Thousands of cancer patients are to be denied life-extending drugs after the Cancer Drugs Fund axed 25 treatments yesterday.

Charities said it was “a devastating decision” that would rob patients’ families of time with their loved ones. On top of cuts earlier this year, the announcement is likely to almost halve the number of patients benefiting from the fund.

The Rarer Cancers Foundation estimates that more than 5,500 patients a year will miss out on treatments in addition to about 5,000 affected by a cull in January that took away 25 of 84 treatments.

Andrew Wilson, the foundation’s chief executive, said: “It is deeply disappointing that NHS England has pressed ahead with kneejerk cuts to the CDF before introducing the reforms to Nice [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence] that are so urgently required.”

He said the decision was a “breach of faith” after ministers had said that they

wanted to work with charities on life-extending treatments.

About 24,600 patients accessed drugs through the scheme last year. The ditched drugs include Kadcylla and Avastin for breast cancer, Revlimid and Imnovid for myeloma, and Abraxane for pancreatic cancer.

Many are available routinely in Scotland and Wales.

David Cameron announced the Cancer Drugs Fund in 2011, with a £200 million annual budget aiming to ensure cancer patients were not denied drugs on cost grounds. However, it consistently overspent, and the funding was increased to £340 million in January. Costs were predicted to reach £410 million this year.

After January’s announcement, six treatments were put back on the list following an appeal, and three drugs were added to the scheme. There is still a chance that some of the drugs could go back on if discounts can be negotiated with their manufacturers.

Kadcylla extends life for women whose breast cancer has spread for an average six months, but for some

patients it can be longer. Paul Workman, chief executive at The Institute of Cancer Research, said: “What we urgently need is a new unified system for evaluating treatments that can attract widespread support and ensure that the most innovative and effective cancer drugs reach the patients who need them as fast as possible.”

Pancreatic Cancer UK said it was “an outrage” that the only pancreatic cancer drug on the list, Abraxane, was being removed despite being approved for use in Scotland and Wales.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said it was committed to the fund, adding: “Advances in medical science mean that new treatments are emerging all the time — so expert clinical decisions mean the fund focuses on those drugs offering the greatest benefit to patients.”

Peter Clark, chairman of the Cancer Drugs Fund, said that it faced “difficult choices” but had to ensure “maximum value from every penny available on behalf of patients”.

The decision will not affect patients already receiving the drugs.