

NHS to stop funding

life-extending

cancer drugs from November

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

THOUSANDS of patients suffering from some of the most common types of cancer will be denied life-extending drugs following sweeping NHS restrictions.

The decisions mean that more than 5,000 patients with breast, bowel, prostate and pancreatic cancer will lose access to critical treatment from November. Charities said the cost-cutting decisions were a "dreadful" step backwards for the health service, which would cut short lives.

The Cancer Drugs Fund began in 2011, following a manifesto pledge by David Cameron, who said patients should no longer be denied drugs be-

cause of costs. But since then it has overspent its budget.

In January a decision was taken to stop providing 19 treatments for cancer, taken by more than 5,000 patients. Now a further 5,500 patients will be refused 17 drugs for 25 forms of the disease.

It means that, in total, the number of patients funded by the scheme has been close to halved.

Drugs that will no longer be funded include Kadcylla for advanced breast cancer, which has been shown to extend life by an average of six months, Abraxane, the first treatment for pancreatic cancer in 17 years and Avastin for forms of advanced breast, bowel and cervical cancer.

Samia al Qadhi, chief executive at

Breast Cancer Care, said the ruling over the drug Kadcylla, one of the greatest hopes to extend life for those with incurable breast cancer, was "completely unacceptable".

"This devastating decision will mean shattered hopes for thousands of women who could have been helped by these drugs," she said.

Baroness Delyth Morgan, chief executive at Breast Cancer Now, said: "This is a dreadful day for breast cancer patients. Kadcylla is a one-of-a-kind drug proven to extend life, and the fact is that because government, the NHS and the pharmaceutical industry have failed to agree realistic prices for new drugs, some women will die sooner."

Charities said the system of NHS

funding was failing the public. Mark Flannagan, chief executive of the charity Beating Bowel Cancer, said: "This is a deeply disappointing day for bowel cancer patients. Yet again, we will see more and more patients being denied proven, clinically effective, internationally recognised standards of treatment."

Andrew Wilson, chief executive of the Rarer Cancers Foundation, said: "These cuts will be a hammer blow to many thousands of desperately ill cancer patients and their families."

Health officials said the proposed decisions are not final, and that pharmaceutical companies had an opportunity to cut prices to ensure drugs provided satisfactory value for money.