

Drug that can 'tear down' cancer defences

By Henry Bodkin

SCIENTISTS have used an experimental drug to "tear down" the defences of the most deadly form of cancer.

Researchers identified and blocked the protein that allows pancreatic cancer to evade and then hijack the immune system.

Used in combination with drugs to boost the immune system, the technique enabled an influx of friendly T-

cells – part of the immune system – on to tumours, which improved the outcomes of mice with the condition.

The scientists, from Cancer Research UK and pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, say the study could unleash a "powerful new weapon".

Only 3 per cent of pancreatic cancer patients survive for five years. The disease killed both Steve Jobs of Apple and actor Patrick Swayze in their 50s.

Prof Peter Johnson, of Cancer Re-

search, said: "Pancreatic cancer has proven hard to treat with immunotherapy because it is often shielded by cells that fend off the immune system."

Researchers identified a protein called CXCR2 that plays a part in the cancer using the immune system to protect itself. Blocking the protein made the tumour easier to treat, said Dr Jennifer Morton, lead author of the study, which is published in the journal *Cancer Cell*.

D-TEL-3-24-June
2016