

Preventative HIV drug approved in Scotland

By Henry Bodkin

SCOTLAND has become the first nation of the UK to approve a controversial new drug which dramatically cuts the risk of catching HIV.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) yesterday approved the routine use of PrEP, intended as a preventative treatment principally for gay and bisexual men who have unprotected sex.

The drug, which studies suggest can reduce the risk of infection by 90 per cent, has been described as a “game changer” in the fight against HIV. Critics have labelled it a “promiscuity pill”.

Health officials had previously said that funding the expensive drug could mean children with cystic fibrosis, deaf children in need of hearing implants, and amputees needing prosthetics could be denied treatment.

The SMC ruling follows a fierce legal battle south of the border last year, in which NHS England unsuccessfully argued that it was not responsible for providing the medicine.

More than 10,000 men in England will now be offered the treatment as part of a trial; however, it has not been approved for routine use. Campaigners said yesterday the “speed and decisiveness of the Scottish process contrasts starkly” with the rest of the UK.

They estimate that up to 1,900 people in Scotland could benefit from the drug, which has the brand name Truvada and costs around £450 a month.

The Terrence Higgins Trust Scotland said funding the drug could save £360,000 in treatment costs for every person it saved from contracting HIV.