



Perjeta approval

Sir, Today's approval of the life-changing breast cancer drug, Perjeta, for routine use in England is fantastic news for thousands of patients and their doctors.

For years, this outcome seemed improbable, as Perjeta is a "combination therapy". It is added to other drugs patients receive (Herceptin and chemotherapy) to increase their benefit, giving nearly 16 additional months of good quality time with their loved ones.

Even where the clinical benefit is demonstrable, it can be near-impossible for the cumulative cost of the combination to meet Nice's cost-effectiveness threshold, particularly where the existing treatments are already near this threshold themselves. In some cases, the combination might fail to be cost-effective even if the new add-on drug is given away for free.

In this instance, two treatments in the combination are in fact made by the same manufacturer. But without reform to the system, we are concerned this landmark approval will prove to be an exception. While robust deal-making is clearly possible, other combination treatments involving drugs made by multiple companies will face even greater obstacles in reaching NHS patients, because of competition law.

Combination therapies can offer significant advances in cancer care. We need this barrier to be addressed to ensure that NHS patients will be able to benefit from them, at prices affordable to the NHS and taxpayer.

BARONESS MORGAN OF DREFELIN
Chief executive, Breast Cancer Now

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