

# Patients to get drug after discount deal

**Chris Smyth** Health Editor

Hundreds of lung cancer patients will receive a cutting-edge immunotherapy drug on the NHS after health chiefs boasted of beating down prices.

The deal was the first test of a controversial policy that allows NHS England to restrict or delay medicines that will cost taxpayers more than £20 million a year, even if deemed cost-effective.

Officials said the threat of such measures had been enough to persuade the drugmaker, MSD, to agree a confidential discount. Pembrolizumab costs £84,000 per patient at full price and to get below the threshold would have to be reduced to a fraction of that. About 1,800 patients a year will now be eligible.

Pembrolizumab is one of new class of medicines that boost the body's own natural defences against cancer. It is used in cancers of the lung, stomach, head and neck, skin and bladder and is being tested in other types such as prostate cancer.

Simon Stevens, head of NHS England, said: "This is another milestone in our rapidly improving modern NHS cancer care. This win-win deal for patients and taxpayers brings genuine innovation and proven survival gains to cancer patients across England."

Louise Houson, of MSD, said: "Funding for pembrolizumab as a first-line lung cancer treatment in relevant patients is a tribute to the partnership we have all achieved."