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## Breakthrough Alzheimer's drug offers a flicker of hope

**N**ews of a breakthrough drug in the US that could slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease has, quite rightly, been given a judiciously guarded welcome by our medical profession, who described the trial results as "intriguing".

Here in the Sandwich Generation, where parents are juggling the needs of teenagers and ailing parents alike, there is untrammelled (and certainly premature) delight.

"What if this actually works?" one girlfriend asked rhetorically. "This could give me back my life."

It sounds selfish, unless you have spent six months hammering up and down the motorway to look after your elderly father, who is regularly found wandering in his pyjamas, and fear a future nursing your mother if she too succumbs to the ravages of Alzheimer's.

Of course, it's very early days. The trial of the medicine known only as BAN2401 involved 856 patients with dementia symptoms, and its findings, reported at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Chicago, were described as "intriguing" rather than "pioneering".

But it was proved to significantly slow the development of Alzheimer's compared with a control group. And that glimmer of hope has greatly buoyed the spirits of family carers dealing with their loved ones' distress.

My friend knows that any such drug will take years to reach the market and will come too late to help their parent, but knowing that effective research is taking place remains a comfort.

If the initial progression of Alzheimer's could be halted, perhaps that could lead to groundbreaking medicines that cure the disease.

But the burning question is, will the hard-pressed NHS and local health authorities make this advanced (and, no doubt, costly) drug available to all?

There are 850,000 people with dementia in the UK, with numbers set to rise to more than a million by 2025, soaring to two million by 2051. I would gladly pay into a national health insurance scheme today than face a wretched postcode lottery tomorrow.