

# MS patients welcome NHS U-turn on drug to slow disease

By Henry Bodkin

SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

HEALTH chiefs are to fund a "landmark" multiple sclerosis drug that can delay the need for a wheelchair by seven years.

MS patients were outraged last year when the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) refused to approve the use of ocrelizumab, which it said was too costly. A petition to reverse the decision was signed by more than 21,000 people.

Yesterday, campaigners welcomed the decision by NHS England to supply the drug, the first effective medicine for people with the early primary progressive form of MS.

The "shelf" price for ocrelizumab, marketed as Ocrevus, is £19,000 per patient per year. But NHS England has struck a deal with makers Roche to obtain it at a reduced price.

Clinical trials of ocrelizumab showed an average drop of 25 per cent in the risk of the disease getting worse, and delays in the onset of disability.

The medicine is administered as an infusion in hospital every six months, and NHS England has said about 2,700 people would be eligible.

Genevieve Edwards, of the MS Society, said: "This is a landmark moment.

"We now want to see everyone who could benefit ... being able to access it. Right now, however, there isn't enough evidence to show ocrelizumab can work for everyone, and we know the restrictions will be a massive blow for those who still don't have any options."

Simon Stevens, chief executive of NHS England, said: "The NHS is making a significant advance in the care of people living with MS. This deal is further proof that companies willing to work flexibly with the NHS can secure a constructive partnership that benefits both patients and taxpayers."

DTL. 61 May 2019