

Giving drug sooner 'can reduce the risk of dying early'

Chris Smyth

Giving a prostate cancer drug sooner to men with advanced disease can cut their risk of dying early by a third, a trial has found.

Enzalutamide reduced the chance of tumours growing by 60 per cent during the trial and now offers men an alternative to gruelling chemotherapy.

However, the drug is six times the cost of standard chemotherapy and is unlikely to be approved by the NHS

until scientists can show that it dramatically improves quality of life. The drug is available on the NHS once hormone treatment fails.

Hormone therapy to reduce levels of testosterone, which fuels tumour growth, is the standard treatment for the roughly 10,000 men a year in Britain who are diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer. An international trial of 1,125 men looked at giving enzalutamide alongside hormone therapy and compared results to standard care. In

results presented to the annual meeting of the American Society for Clinical Oncology (Asco) in Chicago, 28 per cent of men on standard care died over three years compared with 20 per cent of those on enzalutamide.

Ian Davis, of Monash University, who led the trial, said: "The actual result in patients starting hormonal therapy . . . was far higher than we expected. The survival benefit is substantially greater giving it at this stage than it is further down the track — you get

much greater bang for your buck." Neeraj Agarwal, of Asco, said: "In addition to helping men live longer overall, this approach means they can also go longer without having to take steroids or receive chemotherapy."

Matthew Hobbs, deputy director of research at Prostate Cancer UK, described the research as a "positive trial" but said it did not show it was more effective than standard practice — combining chemotherapy "upfront" with hormone injections — in the UK.

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