

asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma, Alimta will be given to NHS patients

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Jan 24 2008 by Audrey Barton, The Journal

NORTH-EAST campaigners have won their three-year battle to get a life-prolonging lung cancer drug funded on the NHS.

Alimta, which is the only treatment for asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma, will be given to NHS patients with advanced stages of the disease who cannot have surgery.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) yesterday issued guidance following a two-and-a-half year approval process, which included two appeals.

The guidance means that primary care trusts (PCTs) will be able to fund the drug for all NHS patients with mesothelioma for whom the treatment is suitable.

The North-East has one of the highest concentrations of the disease which has its roots in heavy industry such as shipbuilding.

Chris Knighton, of Wallsend, North Tyneside, lost her husband Mick to mesothelioma, prompting her to raise more than £330,000 for research.

The founder of the Mick Knighton Mesothelioma Research Fund said: 'I am absolutely delighted as really today is a victory for us as we have been fighting for this for three years.

'I think that hopefully in the future making the drug accessible to patients who have had surgery is something that could be possibly looked at to make it accessible for more patients. My concern is that now PCTs make the drug available for mesothelioma patients as they don't have the benefit of time.'

Arthur Tiffin, 53, of North Walbottle, Newcastle, who died from mesothelioma last summer, led the campaign to make Alimta available for patients in the region which was successful in 2005. NICE initially ruled against the use of Alimta across the NHS but made a U-turn last year and issued guidance recommending the life prolonging drug.

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But two appeals were lodged in September, the first for the drug to be extended for people who had surgery, and the second stating that it did not fall within the special criteria for funding drugs over a £30,000 threshold have been dismissed on all counts. Yesterday's recommendation was delayed by several months subject to an appeal hearing but marks the end of a long running battle for the drug to be funded on the NHS.

Blaydon MP Dave Anderson, a patron of the Mick Knighton Mesothelioma Research Fund charity, said: "The Government now needs to ensure that there is a level playing field across the whole of the UK for workers stricken by this disease.

"It is only right that treatment is available according to need and not cost