



Health Newsletter

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YOUR PATIENTS MAY BE ABLE TO GAIN ACCESS TO NEW IMMUNOTHERAPY DRUG

A new type of immunotherapy drug, Pembrolizumab (also known by its brand name Keytruda) has shown significant effectiveness in the treatment of malignant pleural mesothelioma.

The treatment is not currently available to mesothelioma sufferers through the NHS but funding for the treatment can be pursued as part of a personal injury claim by those mesothelioma sufferers seeking compensation due to asbestos exposure.

What is Pembrolizumab and how does it work?

Cancer cells are adept at evading detection by the body's immune system. They send out chemical signals that convince the immune system that a tumour is healthy tissue. The signals specifically disrupt the effectiveness of the body's "T-cells", whose job it is to hunt down and destroy foreign cells. Safe from attack by the T-cells, the cancer cells can continue to multiply.

Pembrolizumab is an immune checkpoint inhibitor. It is designed to enhance the body's natural defences against tumours. It achieves this by blocking a protein on the surface of the T-cells called PD-1. Blocking PD-1 allows the T-cells to recognise cancer cells as a threat and kill them.

The treatment, as will be seen in the summary of clinical trials below, is thought to be more effective in patients whose tumours are PD-L1 positive. PD-L1 is a protein found on the surface of cancer cells. However, on current evidence, negativity for PD-L1 should not preclude use of the treatment.



How and when is Pembrolizumab administered?

Pembrolizumab is a second line treatment, to be administered once the patient shows signs of a progressive disease after chemotherapy treatment has been exhausted.

The treatment is administered intravenously every three weeks. Initially clinical assessments before treatment will be used to assess progress, with scans taking place usually after 4 treatments. Treatment continues if the patient's clinical status is stable or improving and if scans show no progression of the disease.

CT scans are the usual method of radiological assessment in mesothelioma cases but PET scans are recommended as they may show additional information; serial PET scans can show increases or decreases of metabolic activity, providing further insight into the effectiveness of the treatment.

Clinical Trials for immunotherapy drug, Pembrolizumab

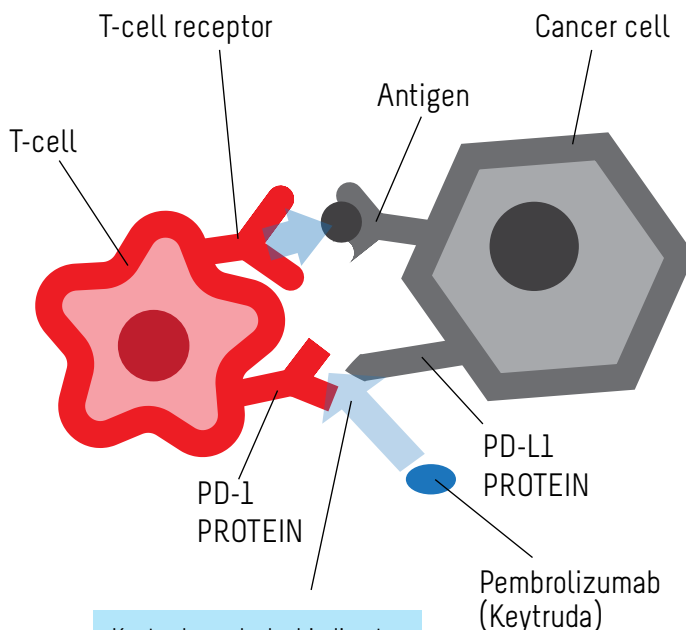
A 2017 study published by Dr Evan Alley looked at the effect of Pembrolizumab treatment in 25 mesothelioma patients who had previously received chemotherapy and who were experiencing disease progression when they joined the trial.

The drug was administered to the patients every two weeks, in some cases for up to two years. 14 of the 25 patients experienced initial tumour reduction during treatment. Median progression free survival was 5.4 months. Median overall survival was 18 months. 4 patients lived for more than two years from the trial start date.

This initial study included only patients whose tumours were PD-L1 positive. A subsequent study in Australia (Rivalland et al) showed response in 2 of 9 patients who were PD-L1 negative and in 2 of 5 patients who were PD-L1 positive. An American study (Kindler et al) reported a numerically higher response rate in patients with PD-L1 positive tumours (27%) than PD-L1 negative tumours (12%).

Based on the current evidence, patients whose tumours are PD-L1 negative are less likely to show a favourable response but negativity for this protein should not automatically preclude treatment.

A T-cell recognises an antigen on the surface of a tumour cell but the cancerous cell uses a protein called PD-L1 to bind to the T-cell's PD-1 immune checkpoint. In this way the tumour cell obstructs the T-cell's attack



Keytruda works by binding to the T-cell's PD-1 protein, to stop the tumour cell from attaching its PD-L1 proteins and disabling the T-cell

How can patients access the new drug treatment?

Pembrolizumab treatment for mesothelioma patients is not available on the NHS and so it must be funded privately. Unfortunately, as can be seen from the funding outline below, the treatment is very expensive:

Estimated costs for 2 cycles of treatment: **£61,500**

Cycle 1

Oncologist, clinic fees, blood tests and scans providing baseline measure of mesothelioma activity: **£3,000**
 Four doses of Pembrolizumab at approximately £7,000 per dose: **£28,000**

Cycle 2

CT Scan or PET scan to assess treatment outcomes: **£2,500**
 Four further doses: **£28,000**

The fact is very few mesothelioma patients will be able to afford the treatment. However, for those patients pursuing a personal injury claim due to asbestos exposure, it is possible to seek the costs of the treatment to be included in the amount of compensation payable. As part of the compensation process, expert medical evidence will be sought. If this supports eligibility for treatment then the costs can be claimed for as long as the treatment is shown to be effective.

Access to this breakthrough treatment is therefore, for the majority of mesothelioma sufferers, intrinsically linked to recovering compensation because otherwise the treatment cannot be paid for. The National Asbestos Helpline is in a position to help. Our expert team can help your patient assess whether they are eligible for compensation. We can explain how the process works and allay any concerns your patient may have. We can put your patient in touch with expert mesothelioma lawyers who can secure funding for this life-changing treatment.

If you or your patient would like more information, please call the National Asbestos Helpline FREEPHONE 0808 223 0726.

Help reinstate compensation for pleural plaques - sign the petition!



We need you, your family and friends to sign a petition that asks for compensation to be reinstated for pleural plaques in England and Wales.

The petition has been organised by the South Wales Asbestos Support Group (SWASG) and only takes a few minutes to sign.

The current law is unfair to those exposed to asbestos in Wales and England because financial compensation for pleural plaques is still available to people exposed to asbestos in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Edward Gilbertson, co-ordinator of SWASG has been diagnosed with pleural plaques. He says:

“We were all exposed to asbestos by employers and governments who knew or chose to ignore the fact that it is a killer. We should all be treated equally and fairly.

“When you’re told you have asbestos in your lungs it’s frightening. What does it mean for your future health? Will you develop another asbestos disease? It’s always at the back of your mind and a constant worry.”

In 2007 the House of Lords (now the Supreme Court) ruled that people with pleural plaques would not qualify for compensation after insurance companies challenged workers’ rights to claim.

Compensation for pleural plaque was reinstated in Scotland in 2009 and Northern Ireland in 2011 by legislation passed by the countries’ devolved parliaments.

For more details about SWASG and updates on the petition you can visit www.swasg.wales.

What are pleural plaques?

Pleural plaques are areas of scarring or calcification on the pleura, which is a thin membrane inside the ribcage surrounding the lung. It consists of two layers. The inner layer covers the lung and the outer layer lines the ribcage and diaphragm. The two layers are normally in contact and secrete a small amount of fluid.

Pleural plaques more commonly occur on the outer pleura on the lower chest wall or diaphragm, though occasionally are also found on the inner pleura.

They are caused by exposure to asbestos but do not usually develop until some 20 to 40 years after first exposure. Diagnosis is usually by X-ray.

Pleural plaques do not cause symptoms and should not impact on health. But the condition does confirm that the patient has asbestos in their lungs.

HOW DO I SIGN THE PETITION?

Go straight to the following webpage and enter your name, email and postcode:
www.you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/reinstate-compensation-for-pleural-plaques-in-england-and-wales

OR

Go to www.38degrees.org.uk and type in “pleural plaques” in the search bar at the top of the webpage. The search will bring up the link to the petition page.

OR

Call our FREEPHONE number 0808 163 9257 or email elliott@nationalasbestos.co.uk and we will organise to send you a physical copy of the petition for you, family, friends and colleagues to sign. You will then have to send it back to us in an envelop addressed to ‘FREEPOST National Asbestos Helpline’ (no stamp or any other address details are required).

THE NAH PRESENTS

The National Asbestos Helpline travels the country presenting to hospital units, GP surgeries and health clinics. The educational talks highlight asbestos-related diseases, symptoms, victim demographics and what can be done to help patients. If you would like us to come to you, call Ronan on 01244 684 471 or email ronan@nationalasbestos.co.uk.

A night odyssey for an amazing cancer centre

The National Asbestos Helpline team again pledges to raise funds for Maggie's Cancer Care.

Maggie's is an incredible charity doing extraordinary things for people affected by cancer. Built in the grounds of NHS cancer hospitals, Maggie's Centres provide free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer, their families and friends.

As part of our fundraising efforts we took part in the charity's Liverpool Culture Crawl 2017. This is a 10 kilometre walk around Liverpool city centre at night. During the crawl you are given access to places you wouldn't normally see.

It was a fantastic event last year,

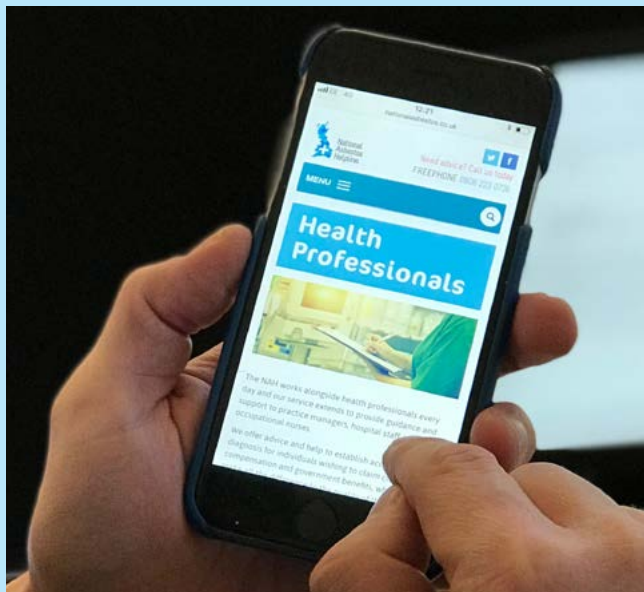
and we didn't think it could get any better - we were glad to be proved wrong! Everyone had an amazing evening of culture (and crawling) and the sights we saw were truly spectacular. We also raised nearly £1,000 on the night!

Maggie's Culture Crawl takes place across the UK – anywhere there is a Maggie's Centre - from London to Swansea, Glasgow to Gloucester.

We choose to fundraise for Maggie's because the charity helps many people diagnosed with asbestos-related lung cancer and mesothelioma. You can find out more about Maggie's Centres by going to www.maggiescentres.org or calling 0300 123 1801.



Our new website has a section devoted to health professionals



We have been working behind the scene to create a new National Asbestos Helpline website. As well as offering better navigation and making it more mobile friendly, we have created a dedicated section for health professionals. We hope that it provides useful information about asbestos-related issues that can be passed onto patients and colleagues.

You can find the section by simply clicking on the 'health professional' tab at the end of the main toolbar. Go to:

www.nationalasbestos.co.uk

DO YOU NEED HANDHELD FANS?

Research studies suggest that a cool draft of air from a handheld fan can help reduce the feeling of breathlessness in a patient.

The research supports anecdotal evidence from respiratory nurses and physiotherapists. If your patients could benefit from using this technique then we have a limited number of handheld fans available on a first-come-first-served basis.

We can send up to 5 fans to each person upon request. The fans are free but please note that they do not come with batteries, which will have to be purchased by the user.



If you would like to know more about the fans please email ronan@nationalasbestos.co.uk or call Ronan Kennedy on 01244 684 471.