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Experts join forces to study affordable malaria drug for treating colorectal cancer

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Experts from St George's University of London, and St George's Hospital have joined forces to investigate whether a common and cheap malaria drug can be used also against cancer.

The researchers and clinicians raised more than £50,000 through a crowd funding campaign to fund the second part of their trial into whether the drug artesunate can tackle colorectal cancer and now are recruiting patients to take part in their clinical studies.

In all £54,247 was raised through crowd funding to investigate whether the drug can help cancer patients by reducing the multiplication of tumour cells and decreasing the risk of cancer spreading or recurring after surgery.

If it does the drug could be used to provide a cheaper adjunct to current expensive chemotherapy.

Professor Sanjeev Krishna, an infectious disease expert at St George's, University of London, who jointly leads the study with Professor Devinder Kumar, a colorectal cancer surgeon based at St George's Hospital, said: "We are delighted that the next phase of our study is now going ahead and we are looking forward to working with patients to examine whether this important work can have a real impact on cancer patients' lives.

"Working with colleagues at St George's Hospital has proved invaluable. Our partnerships will now also include Ashford and St Peter's University Hospitals and Kingston University Hospital NHS Foundation Trusts so we can speed up the process of recruiting patients and getting the study results.

"Collaborations like this between the academic researchers and clinicians in our leading hospitals are the bedrock of our opportunities to gain understanding and potential breakthroughs in treatment that can benefit many.

"Other centres are also welcome to join if interested in our work, which is

now moving into answering the clinically important questions aiming to change practice."

Researchers worked with supporters from the public, patients, colleagues and charities including Bowel Disease UK and the AntiCancer Fund to support their crowdfunding campaign on FutSci, an organisation that aims to support crowdfunding for research, innovation and technology in the life sciences.

A charity, Bowel Disease UK, started by Gary Douch after he became a patient treated by Professor Kumar donated £200,000 to fund the study.

Professor Devinder Kumar, who has been a colorectal cancer surgeon for three decades, added: "We are proud to have set up this pioneering study at St George's University and St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. We hope that this study will help to answer some really important research questions to see if a simple intervention with an established, off patent and affordable antimalarial drug such as artesunate taken for 2 weeks before surgery can reduce the risk of cancer recurrence in patients with Stage II/III bowel cancer. The overall aim of our research is to improve patient survival and quality of life. Research into repurposing drugs in this way for new disease indications is vital and an excellent use of resources for the NHS."

Artesunate is derived from the plant *Artemisia annua* also known as Sweet Wormwood. The Chinese scientist Tu Youyou whose research in the 1960s led to the development of artesunate from a plant used in Chinese traditional medicine, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine 2015.

More than one million patients are diagnosed with colorectal cancer globally each year. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in men and the second most common cancer in women and is a leading cause of mortality. In the UK, 110 new cases are diagnosed daily, with older patients particularly at risk of death. Current treatments involve complex combinations of surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Source:

<http://www.sgul.ac.uk/news/news-archive/new-clinical-trial-cancer-70p-malaria-drug>
