



A new radiotherapy technique could revolutionise cancer treatment

New radiotherapy technology can reduce the severe side effects of treating cancers of the head and neck* according to latest trial results** presented at the National Cancer Research Institute Conference today (Monday).

The phase III trial, funded by Cancer Research UK and run by The Institute of Cancer Research*** and The Royal Marsden Hospital, found that patients given the new kind of radiotherapy were 50 per cent less likely to suffer from dry mouth – the main side effect of treatment.

Dry mouth is a lack of saliva caused by radiotherapy damage to the saliva glands, which are often close to the tumour. It can affect speaking, eating and oral health.

But the new technology – called Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy (IMRT) – more accurately targets an effective dose of radiotherapy to the tumour, reducing damage to healthy organs, in this case the saliva glands.

The trial called PARSPORT involved 94 participants. Half were treated with traditional radiotherapy and the other half were treated with the new radiotherapy.

The researchers found that after 12 months, only 39 per cent of patients who had the new treatment suffered from dry mouth compared to 74 per cent who had the traditional treatment.

Dr Chris Nutting, chief investigator on the trial, and co-chair for phase III radiotherapy trials in NCRI said: "Our trial results are really exciting and mean that side effects from the treatment of cancers in the head and neck could be greatly reduced.

"Damage to the saliva glands can be really debilitating for patients and often the damage is permanent. This can mean patients are left without enough saliva for the rest of their lives which affects their speech and means they are more likely to have poor oral health.

"The findings strongly support a change in UK clinical practice. We would hope to see the new radiotherapy treatment used as standard treatment in hospitals very soon."

David Jenkins, a journalist who is now 61, took part in the PARSPORT trial after a diagnosis of throat cancer. David says, "After I was diagnosed I was told that the radiotherapy treatment I needed would leave me with debilitating side effects. But I got lucky: I agreed to take part in the PARSPORT trial and was randomly chosen for the new treatment - to my great good fortune because I sailed through my treatment with virtually no side effects. I was able to eat and drink normally throughout treatment and ever since. My taste buds were unaffected and I have at no time suffered from a dry mouth. I feel so lucky to have been part of this trial. I really hope more people with this type of cancer can benefit in the future from this new way of giving radiotherapy."

Kate Law, director of clinical trials at Cancer Research UK, said: "This key trial shows the huge potential that Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy has

for the treatment of head and neck cancer. The new method of delivering radiotherapy is a real improvement as treatment can be tailored to the size and shape of tumours, so it's more likely to be effective and less likely to damage surrounding tissues. This means it has the potential to help around one in five cancer patients.

"Cancer Research UK is funding a number of clinical trials which aim to perfect this treatment for many other cancers including prostate and lung."

Dr Jane Cope, director of the NCRI, said: "NCRI has recently set up a new working group to develop an ambitious portfolio of practice-changing trials in radiotherapy, and to coordinate research in this area as well as its translation into practice. PARSPORT is an excellent example of the type of innovation we want to encourage."

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For media enquiries please contact Laura Dibb on 020 7061 8051 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to Editors:

*Head and neck cancers include cancers of the throat, tongue and mouth.

For more information on oral cancers go to <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats/types/oral/incidence/>

**Read the abstract of the presentation on the NCRI Cancer Conference website: http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/programme/speakerAbstracts/2009Show_Chris_Nutting.asp

*** The trial was co-ordinated by the Cancer Research UK funded Clinical Trials and Statistics Unit at The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR-CTSU) under the leadership of Emma Hall, Deputy Director (Research) ICR-CTSU.

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The fifth annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 4-7 October 2009 at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in

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April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 **member organisations** for the benefit of **patients**, the public and the scientific community.

For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

About Cancer Research UK

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to beating cancer through research.
- The charity's groundbreaking work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives. This work is funded entirely by the public.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates double in the last thirty years.
- Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of more than 4,800 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call **020 7121 6699** or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

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