

Spider's Appeal

Supporting research to beat leukaemia

Professor Alan Burnett at Cardiff University is leading a trial to find new and better treatments for people with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML). The trial is called AML17 and is recruiting children and young people.



Professor Burnett and his team are testing a number of different combinations of chemotherapy drugs to find out which is better at controlling the disease and preventing it from coming back, and which causes the fewest side effects.

For example, the researchers are testing the benefits of adding a new drug called **Mylotarg** to chemotherapy. Mylotarg is made up of a chemotherapy drug attached to a molecule called an antibody. The antibody can recognise the leukaemia cells, latching onto them delivering the drug straight to those cells. The hope is that giving Mylotarg alongside other chemotherapy drugs will kill more cancer cells without increasing the side effects of treatment.

The results of the trial will show which of the different treatment combinations is most beneficial, and will help inform doctors of the best way to treat future patients with AML.

January 2013 progress report – AML17 trial

Mr Barry Atkinson, along with Spider, visited Professor Burnett and the team in February 2013, to see how the research is progressing...

Overall the trial is progressing well. A key part of running a large trial like AML17 is recruiting patients – if too few join the trial, the results will not be accurate enough to help change the way the disease is treated. For the AML17 trial, patient recruitment involves finding people with acute myeloid leukaemia who are able to receive the types of treatments being offered through the trial.

The trial is recruiting patients at 131 hospitals in the UK and internationally, and is slightly ahead of schedule – the aim is for at least 3000 patients to join the trial in total, and 2113 have joined to date¹.

¹ The Experimental Cancer Medicine Network (ECMC), in partnership with Cancer Research UK, is playing a key part in enabling phase 1 trials to take place. Pharmaceutical companies on the whole aren't interested in funding the early stage of trials, yet without that first step, clinical trials can't progress into new treatments. For more information, please use this link: <http://www.ecmcnetwork.org.uk/about-us/>

Patients on the trial are divided into groups that receive different types of treatment, so that these treatments can be compared. Several sections of the trial are now full – this is good news as it means these groups have enough patients to help give clear results at the end of the trial.

One section of the trial that has recently opened to recruitment involves monitoring patients after treatment, to see if this can help doctors detect and treat the disease earlier if it comes back. The researchers have been investigating molecular markers in bone marrow and blood samples – these markers are like warning signals, giving an early indication of when the cancer might be returning. The researchers hope that it could be possible to predict when a patient’s leukaemia might come back, so that extra treatment can be started as soon as possible.



Here is Barry with Professor Burnett (far right), the team and (a clearly enthralled!) Spider.