

Glimmer of hope in asbestos cancer battle

AUSTRALIAN scientists have made a breakthrough that brings a glimmer of hope to people with a deadly cancer caused by asbestos.

The cancer affects a small percentage of people exposed to asbestos but it is relatively common in Australia with about 650 new cases a year.

There is no cure for the disease, which takes about 35 years to develop and most people die within 18 months of diagnosis.

So far, treatment developed at the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute has shown remarkable results in tests on mice with malignant mesothelioma taken from humans.

Now, institute director Professor Nico van Zandwijk and his team are preparing to test the TargomiRs treatment on humans.

First stage trials start at the end of 2013 and will determine the optimal and safe dose.

"Treatment options for this asbestos-related cancer are very limited and effective new therapies are urgently needed," Prof van Zandwijk said at the announcement of the trial in Sydney on Wednesday.

Carol Klintfalt, 63, says she is thrilled to be taking part in the trial.

"Last year they told me the chemo was not working anymore. To me this is life or death."

Ms Klintfalt was diagnosed at the age of 57 and feels privileged to have had time with her three grandchildren.

"It is wonderful to still be alive."

She could have been exposed to asbestos in her 20s, when she worked for an architect in Sydney or later when she refurbished houses with her engineer husband.

"I remember buying sheets of asbestos and not having any idea it was deadly.

"No cancer is a good cancer but this is a man-made cancer."

She says her family has become involved in her illness and her son Mathew, 28, is dedicated to informing people his age about the dangers of asbestos. He has climbed Mount Aconcagua in the Andes mountains to raise money for the cause.

"It is his generation buying their first house. They are the people doing DIY and thinking they are invincible," Ms Klintfalt said.

Prof van Zandwijk says he does not want to raise false hope but he is cautiously optimistic the treatment will work.

"I think the whole concept is sound and we feel very reassured.

"While our preclinical research was confined to mesothelioma, we hope that this new approach to cancer treatment will also inhibit other tumour types."

Speaking at the launch, Federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said: "This will allow further research into the most promising treatment for mesothelioma yet discovered. It means that we might have a cure in a few years."

Mentioning the sadness of losing a family friend to the disease, she said: "Anyone who has been touched by mesothelioma, and there are so many Australians who have been, will be so excited about this. It's just such a wonderful day."

The trial is made possible by a \$1.2 million donation from the family of Andrew Lloyd, who died of malignant mesothelioma in 2011 after coming into contact with asbestos during building renovations.

* For information about how to manage the asbestos risk in pre-1987 homes, go to www.asbestosawareness.com.au

Read more: <http://www.news.com.au/breaking-news/national/glimmer-of-hope-in-asbestos-cancer-battle/story-e6frfku9-1226688748409#ixzz2bNg4ywuM>