

NEW DRUG GIVES PEACE OF MIND

For many West Australians with early breast cancer, the fear of the cancer returning even after completion of successful treatment is an ongoing concern. For patients with HER2 positive breast cancer who have completed early chemotherapy and trastuzumab, a new drug can give some peace of mind.

HER2 is a protein on the outside of some breast cancer cells. It promotes cell growth. Breast cancer cells with higher than normal levels of HER2 are called HER2-positive, those with lower levels are called HER2-negative. The approval of trastuzumab for use in HER2 positive breast cancer has greatly improved the outcomes for many.

Neratinib is an oral medication which can block the effects of HER2 in a different way to trastuzumab.

BCRC-WA were very pleased to be involved in a large clinical trial designed to show that giving neratinib to patients with HER2 positive breast cancer after they had completed chemotherapy and trastuzumab would decrease the risk of the cancer returning. Internationally the trial included more than 2,800 participants. In fact, BCRC-WA had the largest number of participants at any one centre with more than 40 West Australian women gaining pre-approval access to this new drug.

The clinical trial showed a significant improvement in the outcome for these patients and resulted in the drug being approved for use in this setting.



NERATINIB

Professor Chan was the lead author and chairperson of the steering committee on a study of neratinib given to patients with early stage, HER2 positive breast cancer after chemotherapy and trastuzumab (Herceptin). The study aimed to show that adding neratinib in this setting would reduce the risk of breast cancer recurring in other parts of the body in the two years following chemotherapy and trastuzumab. More than 40 patients participated in the study at BCRC-WA out of more than 2,800 participants across 495 locations worldwide.

The study found that 12 months of neratinib given after chemotherapy and trastuzumab did significantly improve the outcome for these patients. Neratinib is now approved for use in Australia in this setting and this trial led to the drug's approval in the USA and Europe.