Living with lung cancer

Clinical trials

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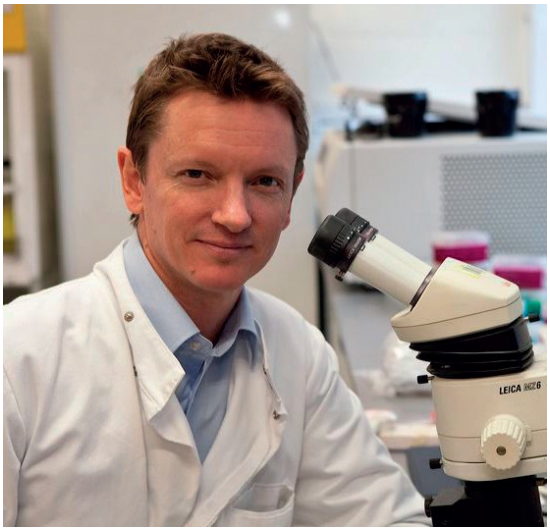

When doctors are uncertain about whether one type of investigation or treatment is better than another they try to answer this by involving patients in clinical trials. Most of the information that doctors have about new treatments is obtained in this way.

During a clinical trial, detailed information is collected about each patient, drug side-effects and how well the treatment has worked.

When this information is collected and compared from all the patients in your trial, it should become clear how good the treatment is. Without clinical trials it would be very difficult to know which cancer drugs work best.

I have been asked by my doctor to take part in a clinical trial. What does this mean?

All clinical trials have to be passed by a committee of doctors and members of the public before they begin. Involvement in a clinical trial is completely voluntary. If you decide that you want to stop being involved in a trial, then you simply have to tell your doctor. This will not affect your chances of future treatment if other options are available.

How do I know that clinical trials are safe?

Trials take place in a variety of locations including cancer centres and district hospitals. If you are interested in discussing clinical trials, then ask your cancer doctor for further information on what trials are available in your area. Cancer Research UK can also provide details of clinical trials, which are taking place throughout the country. For further information contact them on **0808 800 4040**.

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Are there different types of clinical trial?

Yes, there are four different types of clinical trial, which are detailed below:

Phase 1: A Phase 1 trial of a new drug, or mixture of drugs, is available if your cancer has returned despite having previous treatment, or there is no effective standard treatment available. If a new drug has been shown to work well in laboratory experiments and animal tests, it is important to know whether it also works well for humans, without causing too many side-effects. This usually involves weekly visits (sometimes more often) to the hospital to measure blood counts and assess side-effects. You may like the close attention received during the visits but it can be disruptive to normal social and family activities. The dose of drug is increased with each new group of patients (usually three in each group). The higher the dose, the more likely side-effects are to occur however, there may also be a greater chance of response.

Phase 2: If results of a Phase 1 study show that a drug/treatment may be effective, without causing too many side-effects, then the next step is to a Phase 2 trial. This will examine how well a particular drug works for a certain type of cancer. The dose that you are given remains the same throughout the trial.

Phase 3: If a treatment has successfully passed through Phase 1 and 2 a Phase 3 trial is performed. This compares two different forms of treatment; usually the new treatment against the standard treatment. Phase 3 trials involve a larger number of patients than 1 and 2, often involving hundreds of patients and taking many years to complete.

Phase 4: Phase 4 trials are done after a drug has been shown to work and has been given a license. Doctors do these trials to increase understanding of how a drug works and who it works best for.

This information has been taken from the following sources:
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