

NICE OKs mesothelioma drug

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Pemetrexed Disodium (Alimta) will now be available across the NHS for malignant pleural mesothelioma in certain cases after NICE threw out an appeal.

After a two-and-a-half-year wait because of approval processes NICE has recommended Pemetrexed Disodium for patients who have WHO performance status of 0 (able to carry out all normal activity without restriction) or 1 (restricted in strenuous activity but able to move around and carry out light work), or who are considered to have advanced disease or for whom surgical resection is considered inappropriate.

Mesothelioma is incurable but the drug can increase life expectancy and reduce symptoms. At present Pemetrexed Disodium is available in certain areas of the country but its prescription is not widespread across the UK.

Dr Gillian Leng, Deputy Chief Executive of NICE said:

"I know that some patients and healthcare professionals have criticised the time it has taken for us to issue guidance. In this instance two separate appeal stages have delayed the publication of our final guidance. However I am confident that we have reached the right conclusion."

Adrian Budgen, a solicitor specialising in asbestos related diseases said:

"Until now, only a small number of sufferers have qualified for Alimta so there has been a deeply regrettable postcode lottery in existence. Although it is far from being a cure, the patients who respond well to this treatment will have a better quality of life and that can only be a good thing."

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