

Noteworthy

A PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

BY LIZ WHAMOND

It seems that every day we hear of breakthroughs with respect to treating cancer and there are more on the horizon. But what about drugs that we already know about, that show at least some hope for treating cancer? How can the necessary trials be funded for those drugs?

Every once in a while we hear of older drugs, that are often used to treat other diseases, having potential to have an impact on cancer treatment or prevention of recurrence. One of those is metformin, which is commonly used in the treatment of diabetes. It's cheap, been around for years and is generally well tolerated. Dr. Goodwin at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital spent roughly 10 years finding money to fund research to discover metformin's potential to prevent or control cancer. The evidence to do this study has come from animal models and cell studies, and from basic research scientists. Eventually she was able to fund the research using money from the US government, the Canadian Cancer Society and some US cancer charities. As the patent was about to expire, there was no interest from drug companies to fund new research into other uses for metformin.

So the story continues. In July my ears perked up at the news that aspirin or its generic form may also be effective in the treatment of breast cancer. Dr. Michelle Homes, a Harvard University researcher, claims that she has been turned down several times by US federal funding agencies. This drug is off patent and therefore there is no business case for pharmaceutical manufacturers to fund the approximately \$10M price tag to do the trial.

Should a trial show positive results, it would be a cheap way of treating breast cancer in both the developed and developing world. It been around for decades, is reasonably well tolerated and may have the potential to save many lives from breast cancer.

It seems a colossal sin not to fund a clinical trial. So who should fund this research? Surely there are non-profits and others who could form a cross border alliance to raise this money. What about the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation? What about the Susan G. Komen Foundation? There are many that raise funds in the name of cancer. What about the Terry Fox Foundation? Couldn't the federal governments of both Canada and the US contribute? In the whole scheme of things, \$10M is small potatoes compared to what the disease is costing the medical systems in both countries. And many lives could potentially be spared.

We urgently need someone to step up to the plate for this kind of research.

Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada

Suite 1902 - 2 Bloor Street West Toronto, Ontario M4W 3R1

Toll free: 1-855-572-3436

email: cacc@canceradvocacy.ca