

FEATURE

Patient commentary: the current model has failed

Emma Robertson *leader of Just Treatment*

The cost of cancer drugs is skyrocketing: prices of cancer drugs increased by 10% every year between 1995 and 2013.¹ More and more we're seeing cancer drugs being priced off the NHS—as is the case with secondary breast cancer drug palbociclib, currently under review after it was rejected by NICE earlier this year because of cost.

Another really hard burden to bear for patients is that so many new drugs to the market don't offer much of an improvement on existing ones: the independent drug bulletin *Prescrire* found that only 7% of 1345 therapeutic drugs assessed between 2000 and 2013 offered “a real advantage” when compared with drugs that were already available.² More than half were “me too” products that aim to take a share of a competitor's market but offer little or no additional therapeutic value for patients.

As someone with secondary breast cancer, I find it incredibly stressful and upsetting to increasingly see that drugs which could be of benefit to patients have such a high price tag that the NHS can't afford to buy them. And at the same time, we are not seeing the development of the new medicines that we need; nor are getting quick enough access to those that have already been developed.

It's clear to me and thousands of other patients like me that our current research and development model has failed. Just

Treatment, a patient led campaign with no ties to the pharmaceutical industry, is calling for a new system that rewards and promotes innovation, so that more effective and accessible cancer medicines are brought within reach. An alternative model such as delinkage—whereby drug prices are decoupled from research and development costs—would reward drug companies for bringing new, effective drugs to market while ensuring these medicines remain an affordable public good. We need new drugs to be made available quickly, safely, and at a price that is affordable.

Competing interests: I have read and understood BMJ policy on declaration of interests and have no interests to declare.

Provenance and peer review: Commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

- 1 Cancer Research UK. Health economics: the cancer drugs cost conundrum. 2016. <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/funding-for-researchers/research-features/2016-08-10-health-economics-the-cancer-drugs-cost-conundrum>
- 2 New drugs and indications in 2013: little real progress but regulatory authorities take some positive steps. *Prescrire Int* 2014;23:107-10. PMID:24860905.

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>