



**Briefing to Parliamentarians**  
June 2019

## **Innovation in brain tumour treatment**

Embracing innovation is of paramount importance when tackling brain tumours, a cancer of the body's most complex organ. This meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Brain Tumours (APPGBT) will focus on some recent examples of innovative therapies derived from rigorous scientific study in the laboratory, which complement advances in other areas such as diagnosis, patient support, treatment pathways and care outcomes, all of which are important parts of the APPGBT's remit.

Ensuring that innovations reach patients' bedsides is a key motivator for many brain tumour campaigners and the recent roll-out of the pink drink – also known as 5-ALA – across England is a good example of how this lobbying can drive the uptake of beneficial new technologies.

The pink drink uses a fluorescent dye to highlight cancerous cells, enabling neurosurgeons to resect more cancerous tissue and conserve healthy tissue when performing brain tumour surgery. This can have a positive effect on the symptoms and side effects that a person experiences after treatment.

It took years of campaigning from across the brain tumour community to bring about the uptake of the pink drink, but the Department of Health and Social Care claims it will now benefit approximately 2,000 patients per year.

The cutting-edge technologies discussed in today's meeting could become tomorrow's pink drink, although it is imperative their efficacy, safety and effectiveness are proved via a robust scientific method, peer review and extensive clinical trials before they are made widely available.

This meeting will look specifically at cannabis-based medicinal products and the challenge of drug delivery for brain tumour treatment.

### **Guest speakers for the APPGBT meeting:**

#### **Medical cannabinoids and their potential anti-cancer properties – Dr Wai Liu**

Dr Wai Liu is a senior research fellow at St George's, University of London. His work focuses on developing novel approaches against cancer.

One of Dr Liu's projects is investigating the use of cannabinoids in combination with radiotherapy as a treatment of brain tumours. Anecdotal evidence presented to him suggested that cannabis could improve the responses to some therapies. This led to a field of work studying the anticancer effects of cannabinoids used both alone and in combination with other treatments.

## Children's Brain Tumour Drug Delivery Consortium – Mr Will Singleton

Mr Will Singleton is a neurosurgeon and researcher from the University of Bristol, with a focus on paediatric neurosurgery and research interests in central nervous system drug delivery. Mr Singleton will address the meeting on behalf of the Children's Brain Tumour Drug Delivery Consortium (CBTDDC), which is based at the University of Nottingham.

The CBTDDC strives to overcome one of the main obstacles to successfully treating brain tumours, namely the blood-brain barrier (BBB). The BBB provides a 'living fortress' that protects the brain from potentially harmful chemicals. While this is a positive thing in our everyday lives, especially for the developing brains of children, the BBB can stop drugs which may be effective in treating tumours getting into the brain.

Mr Singleton will speak about the challenge of drug delivery for brain tumour treatment. He will also introduce the CBTDDC network, which focuses on raising awareness of this challenge among researchers, funders and policy makers, and also on strengthening collaborations between clinicians and researchers to speed up research progress in this area.

*N.B. The APPGBT has invited experts to discuss these new innovations for informational purposes only. The APPGBT does not recommend or endorse any particular treatment, therapy, medicine, device or technology. Brain tumour patients are advised to always consult with a suitably qualified medical professional before commencing any type of treatment.*

## Recent parliamentary debates on brain tumours

The announcement about the pink drink prompted a discussion about brain tumours in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019. The proceedings in the Commons were opened by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, who thanked the APPGBT for its work in campaigning for brain tumour patients and their families.

The APPGBT was delighted to see numerous parliamentarians iterate their support for greater awareness of brain tumours and for reform in areas ranging from research funding to improved diagnostics and patient support.

It was also reassuring to see statements in both Houses emphasising the Government's dedication to overcoming brain tumours.

In the Commons, Mr Speaker, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP, stated: ***"We know in our heart of hearts that continued interest will endure for as long as is necessary, both because of the supreme importance of the cause and because we are united across the House in this."***

In the House of Lords, Baroness Blackwood, a Minister for the Department of Health and Social Care said: ***"... the Government's commitment will not waver..."***

The APPGBT would like to thank all those who attend its meetings, contribute their expertise or support its work more generally. It is thanks to these efforts that the APPGBT is a valuable advocate for the brain tumour community and it is pleased that its calls are being heeded by the Government.



**Brain Tumour  
Research**

Together we will find a cure

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The Brain Tumour Research charity, supported by The Brain Tumour Charity and PB Consulting, provides the Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Brain Tumours.

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