

news

FRIDAY DECEMBER 4 2009


beta
PHARMACEUTICAL LTD

ACN 122 456 571

Plans for anti-cancer pill in two years

CATHY O'LEARY
MEDICAL EDITOR

A daily pill to help prevent breast cancer could be available within two years, after scientists said they planned to start human trials of a vitamin E-based supplement which had shown promising results in mice.

Perth-based biotechnology company Beta Pharmaceutical confirmed this week it would launch its patented preventive pill in 2011.

It would also start clinical trials on an injected form of the treatment for women who already have the disease.

The company's formulation is based on a purified form of palm oil known as gamma tocotrienol, a natural antioxidant already known to reduce blood cholesterol but also believed to have powerful anti-cancer properties.

Studies by scientists in the US involving specially bred mice with breast tumours had shown that tocotrienol derived from palm oil attacked cancer cells in the early stages of the disease, stopping cells from dividing without harming healthy tissue.

This had fuelled hope that it could be used as a once-a-day supplement to prevent breast cancer from developing in the first place.

Beta said this week its low-dose gel capsule would be aimed initially at women at higher risk of developing

breast cancer or those who had already had the disease and wanted to prevent it from returning.

Because it was a natural supplement, it was not expected to need approval by the US Food and Drug Administration and could be sold in pharmacies and health food stores.

The company's principal scientist, Paul Sylvester, from the University of Louisiana's college of pharmacy, said a separate product to treat women who had breast cancer would start human trials within two years.

The synthetic high-dose formulation was designed to treat early-stage breast cancer, together with chemotherapy, and was engineered with nanotechnology to target breast tissue and reverse the disease's progression.

The scientists were also looking at using its low-dose supplement to bolt on to low-dose versions of the cholesterol-lowering drugs, statins, in the hope it could reduce cholesterol but have fewer side-effects and offer the bonus of helping to prevent or treat solid tumour cancers.

Beta managing director Alan Reid said the overall results for tocotrienols and their role in breast cancer management were encouraging.

"Our pre-clinical research work in tocotrienols and breast cancers using our pioneering compound has been under way for almost two years and continues to show excellent progress," he said.