

New drug shrinks brain tumours in melanoma patients

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(Medical Xpress) -- Australian researchers have reported promising results with a new drug that shrinks brain tumours in melanoma patients. Their findings are published in [The Lancet](#) medical journal today.

Medical researchers at the University of Sydney, Melanoma Institute Australia, Sydney's Westmead Hospital and Westmead Millennium Institute, say a new drug they have been testing to treat deadly melanoma in the body also shows, for the first time, an ability to shrink secondary tumors (metastases) in the brains of [patients](#) with advanced forms of the disease.

They say the new drug may add months to the lives of patients whose melanoma has spread to the brain. Most patients with [brain metastases](#) die within four months. The trial's results, however, showed [brain tumours](#) in nine of the 10 patients shrank within the first six weeks. All 10 patients survived beyond five months, two patients survived beyond 12 months. One patient was alive at 19 months.

The drug called Dabrafenib works by targeting a [gene mutation](#) found in melanoma cancer, called the BRAF mutation, which is present in 50 percent of human melanomas. The drug works by binding to the activated mutant form of the BRAF protein in the melanoma cell, causing the cell to stop proliferating. In many cases it shrinks and disappears.

The lead author of the study, Dr. Georgina Long, from the University of Sydney, Melanoma Institute Australia and Westmead Hospital said, "This is the first evidence that we have a systemic drug therapy that helps prolong survival in patients with multiple melanoma brain metastases. The findings are among the most important in the history of drug treatment for melanoma.

"Currently there is no effective systemic treatment

for melanoma brain metastases, and patients whose cancer has spread to the brain are frequently excluded from promising clinical trials. Until now, there has not been a single drug that has shrunk brain metastases in more than 10 out of 100 patients with [metastatic melanoma](#). This drug had a 90 percent success rate in reducing the size of brain metastases.

"Brain metastases in melanoma are a major unsolved problem. Up to this point, melanoma has been notoriously resistant to drug therapy in general, and responses in highly lethal brain [metastases](#) are particularly uncommon. Providing these early data are supported in larger cohorts of patients and durable responses are confirmed, this activity in the brain may assist in addressing a large unmet need in patients with metastatic [melanoma](#) worldwide," Dr. Long said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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