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## NHS to get specialist cancer unit

**Campaigners are welcoming a new move to invest in specialist cancer care for brain and spinal cord tumours.**

Ministers in England have invited hospitals to bid to become the first national centre for proton therapy.

The treatment uses radiation to pinpoint cancerous cells without significantly damaging nearby tissue.

There is already one unit in England, but it only treats the less complex eye cancers, forcing many patients to go abroad and fund the care themselves.

The treatment, which tends to be used on children and those with tumours close to the most sensitive parts of the brain and spinal cord, is available in the US and other European countries, but the bill can often top £100,000.

Experts predict an NHS unit would be used by 400 people a year.

Proton therapy is described as "the most precise form of radiation therapy" as it pinpoints the cancerous cells without significantly damaging nearby tissue.

It works by depositing energy in the target tumour. These electrons damage the DNA of cancerous cells and ultimately cause their death.

The existing proton therapy site at Clatterbridge, on the Wirral, uses a low-energy machine which can only be used to reach cancers near the eye.

Health minister Ann Keen said: "This is significant news for patients with rare cancers, especially children, as having proton therapy will mean that they will receive a better quality of treatment and will not suffer from potential side-effects such as hearing loss and reduced IQ."

Wendy Fulcher, chairman of charity Brain Tumour Research, said: "This is excellent news.

"Previously patients or parents faced a terrible situation, forced to raise funds to go abroad for lifesaving treatment, adding to the stress of a brain tumour diagnosis.

"I hope this signals a shift in policy for increased funding for brain tumour treatment and research which is long overdue."

Martin Ledwick, from Cancer Research UK, added: "It is good to see the department of health encouraging the development of different forms of radiotherapy.

"Although at the moment the number of people this treatment is likely to help is quite small, it is possible that, as we learn more about it, proton therapy may have the potential to have a bigger impact on cancer treatment."



Proton therapy helps to treat cancers in the eye and the brain

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