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Australia approves drug that can 'melt away' cancer cells

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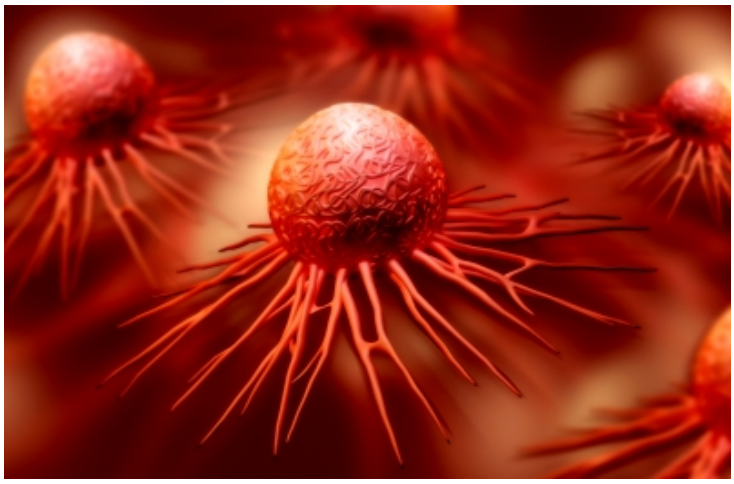

Singapore: Australian authorities have just approved a new drugvenetoclax that is touted to have the power to "melt away" certain advanced forms of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL). Leukemia is the most common type of cancer in Australia, with 1300 people diagnosed each year.

The drug is recommended for patients with relapsed or refractory CLL with 17p deletion - a mutation that makes the disease relatively resistant to standard treatment options - as well as for patients with relapsed or refractory CLL for whom no other treatment options are available.

Venetoclax was discovered and developed with scientists from US pharmaceutical companies AbbVie and Genentech, as part of an international collaboration with the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. The first clinical trials for venetoclax started in Melbourne at the Institute's Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre partners The Royal Melbourne Hospital and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and were led by Australian haematologists.

Professor Doug Hilton AO, director, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research expressed excitement on the news of the drug's approval. He said that the drug will be most importantly benefit patients with limited treatment options.
"The fact that Australians with hard-to-treat chronic lymphocytic leukaemia can now benefit from a drug like venetoclax demonstrates how critically important medical research is to the health of our community," Professor Hilton said.

"TGA approval of venetoclax is a major milestone in a journey spanning decades of powerful and innovative research by teams of leading scientists, clinicians and entrepreneurs, including more than one hundred researchers at Melbourne's Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research."

Professor Andrew Roberts, a clinical haematologist at The Royal Melbourne Hospital and cancer researcher at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and the University of Melbourne, said venetoclax was being combined now with other approved drugs and undergoing phase 2 and phase 3 clinical trials in other blood cancers.
"The hope is that venetoclax, potentially in combination with other approved drugs, could benefit more patients including those with other hard-to-treat types of blood cancer," Professor Roberts said. "Ongoing research suggests that this drug will

be very active against other cancers, so this milestone may just be the beginning."