

## The high cost of cancer drugs

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Managing Editor of ecancermedicalsecience Professor Gordon McVie is quoted in an article in the Western Mail on the recent Wales Cancer Conference:

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May 2 2008 by Madeleine Brindley, Western Mail

SPENDING vast sums of NHS money on new and expensive cancer drugs will deprive other patients of potentially life-saving medicines, an expert claimed.

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, chairman of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, said that if the public wants to spend more on expensive drugs, taxes will have to be raised.

But the annual Wales Cancer Conference in Cardiff yesterday also heard from international cancer experts who argued that a fundamental principle of the NHS was to make effective treatments free to the public.

During a debate about whether all effective cancer treatment should be free, Sir Michael said: "We have to use the money available for healthcare and make it go as far as it possibly can because we cannot spend it twice. If we spend a lot of money on only a few patients, then many will go without."

"One patient's choice of a very, very expensive treatment will inevitably deprive other people of less expensive products."

"If we want to spend more we either raise income tax or we move money from other areas of public expenditure, such as education."

The availability of high- cost cancer drugs is one of the most pressing issues for the NHS, as rates of cancer continue to rise and new treatments are developed.

Wales has some of the highest rates of the disease in Europe and some of the poorest survival rates.

Prof Gordon McVie, who is deputy director of the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, told the conference that people living in deprived areas not only have more cancers but they "do worse, they die in more numbers and they die quicker".

Sir Michael added: "We have to look after everyone in the health service, not just those with cancer, and we have to do it from a finite pot of money and in a fair and equitable way as we can."

But Professor Richard Sullivan of the London School of Economics said: "I believe that the notion that all effective treatment should be free is a fundamental, underpinning principle of the National Health Service.

"A system in which you have to pay for medicines is a system which doesn't deliver equality."

He told the debate in Cardiff's City Hall, that new and innovative medicines should not be the target for cost savings.

Watch an interview with Prof. Richard Sullivan on ecancertv [here](#).

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