

Cancer trials fast-tracked by groundbreaking pathology testing

The role of pathologists in cancer patient care is becoming increasingly significant, and this is resulting in faster approval of new targeted drug therapies, delegates have heard at the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA)'s Pathology Update in Melbourne this weekend.

Pathologist and RCPA spokesperson Professor Paul Waring says that while in the past, only one in 14 drugs entering the drug development process would be approved for use at the end of the process, now up to one in five drugs are making it through the development process to approval – and that this is due to the increased ability to target the drugs to those patients who will benefit most.

“As a result of technological advances in the pathology testing, we’re now able to select patients to take part in the trials who will respond best to a particular drug,” says Professor Waring.

“It’s all about matching the right patient to the right drug.

“In many cases now, the sole determinant of the treatment decision is a pathology test, by which pathologists can advise treating doctors of how a patient will respond to a certain drug or drug combination, based on that patient’s genetic make-up.

“This advancement in pathology testing means an increased incentive for pharmaceutical companies to invest in the development of new drugs, because it is becoming quicker and easier to prove that a certain drug is effective – because we’re only testing it on those patients who we know are predisposed to benefit.”

This ability to target the therapy doesn’t just have benefits for a small group of individuals.

Professor Waring says that for those who we know are unlikely to respond to a certain drug, treating doctors are able to eliminate that drug option immediately, and begin to investigate other options for treatment.

“At the end of the day, personalised medicine means the patients receive the therapies they will most benefit from,” says Professor Waring.

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