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Trametinib, a new drug for treating melanoma, is showing promise in 2012 clinical trials.

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Citation

MLA
Melanoma Drug Shows Promise

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:

There is more encouraging news coming out of that convention of cancer specialists that's under way right now in Chicago. Tonight, it concerns a new type of drug for melanoma, which can be very difficult to treat once it spreads beyond a skin lesion. Our report tonight from our Chief Science Correspondent Robert Bazell.

ROBERT BAZELL, reporting:

Pamela Maddox is a retired teacher who loves to garden and at 57 is quite healthy. But two years ago she was close to death from advanced melanoma until she got an experimental drug which targets cancer genes.

PAMELA MADDOX: It's kind of like being given a second chance. You don't know how long this is going to last but hopefully it's a long-term thing.

BAZELL: Results presented at this cancer conference today show her drug, Trametinib, cut progression of melanoma in 300 patients by 55 percent. Also at the conference, a different drug that enhances the immune response to melanoma and other cancers showed promising results. Both drugs will head to the FDA for approval in the wake of two other drugs recently OK'd for advanced melanoma.

Dr. KEITH FLAHERTY (Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center): Now we have multiple new treatments that we know can be game-changers in a profound way.

BAZELL: Although doctors at this conference recognize the success stories like the increasing ability to fight advanced melanoma, they know there are big challenges ahead like fighting lung cancer and advanced breast and colon cancer. Another challenge, a continuing shortage of many cancer drugs.

Unidentified Doctor: How you feeling today?

BAZELL: While new drugs often cost $100,000 a year or more, the successful older drugs that many patients like 15-year-old Sonali Verma rely on, cost only hundreds and they remain in critically short supply.

Dr. MICHAEL LINK (Stanford University School of Medicine): These drugs that are in short supply are
primarily drugs that are older, they’re fairly cheap in terms of purchasing them and not much of a profit margin for the companies.

BAZELL: The FDA has no authority to tell drug companies what to make. But cancer doctors want legislation so the government can stem the shortages. Robert Bazell, NBC News, Chicago.