



Trials start for breast cancer 'game changer'

Garvan Institute is leading the way

by Emily Macdonald

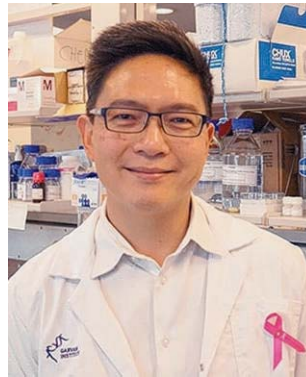
THE Darlinghurst-based Garvan Institute is leading clinical trials for the expanded use of a breast cancer drug that could change the way patients are treated.

A year's supply of ribociclib (known as Kisqali) costs \$70,000 but from July 1 will be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for terminal patients who previously had to scrape together the exorbitant annual cost.

The PBS listing is specifically for the first line treatment of women with inoperable or metastatic hormone receptor positive breast cancer, helping 3,000 Australian women.

However, the Garvan Institute hopes if it can be proved the drug has benefits to a broader group of patients the government will consider expanding the PBS listing.

Associate Professor Elgene Lim is the Garvan Institute's leading breast cancer clinician researcher and one of Australia's foremost ex-



Associate Professor Elgene Lim.

perts. He says the drug prevents the cancer from progressing for about 25 months compared to 15 months achieved with other drugs.

"This drug is a game changer in many ways because of the extent of the benefits for patients," Prof Lim said.

"We are now trialling this drug for early stages of breast cancer with the thought being if it works for metastatic breast cancer what impact will it have on other types of breast cancer?"

"It may be that it can benefit a larger pool of patients."

Although the drug won't be PBS listed until July 1, for the past year patients have received it at the discounted rate as the drug company waived the fees under a compassionate access scheme.

However the PBS listing is still vital as it gives them surety of affordable supply into the future.

Previously women were purchasing the drug from America where pharmacies sell it for \$3000 a month instead of the \$5-6000 they were paying in Australia.

Member for Wentworth, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, announced the PBS listing as part of the recent federal budget.

"Hormone receptor positive tumours are the most common form of breast cancer and account for most of the deaths from the disease," Mr Turnbull says.

"Since coming to office we've listed over 1700 drugs on the PBS — that's one new medicine every day. These are lifesaving and life-changing medicines made more affordable for all Australians."