

Killer into cure – using viruses to treat cancer

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The natural ability of viruses to infect and destroy cells is being used by scientists to kill cancerous tumours, according to an article in the August 2005 issue of *Microbiology Today*, the quarterly magazine of the Society for General Microbiology.

Professor Moira Brown of Southern General Hospital in Glasgow explains how viruses that cause common diseases, such as cold sores and ‘flu, have been modified so that they are no longer harmful, but can target and kill only cancerous cells.

Safety trials have been completed for some of these cancer-killing viruses and now new trials are underway to test how effective they are.

“If we can demonstrate the effectiveness of the viruses, the potential is there to transform the future for people who have cancers that are otherwise untreatable,” said Professor Brown.

“Viruses are normally thought of as ‘bad guys’, but our knowledge and understanding of how they function and how cells become cancerous has allowed them to be turned into ‘good guys’,” said Professor Brown.

“These basic laboratory findings have been transferred to the clinic to control a killer disease.”

One of the viruses, HSV1716, has been given approval by the European Medicines Agency and the UK Department of Health for a crucial efficacy trial in patients with glioma, a type of brain tumour. This will be the most advanced trial of its type and should determine the

effectiveness of the therapy.

Source: Society for General Microbiology

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