New breast cancer treatment offers hope of longer life to younger women

Combining ribociclib with hormone therapy found to cut risk of death by up to a third

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Younger women with breast cancer have been given the hope of living longer after what is described as “one of the greatest advances in breast cancer research in recent decades”.

Adding ribociclib, a targeted drug that disrupts cancer cells, to standard hormone therapy was found to boost survival among premenopausal patients who have an advanced form of the disease.

The risk of death was cut by almost a third compared with those treated with hormone therapy alone, according to the study presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology’s annual meeting in Chicago.

“This is indescribably good news for patients and their families,” said Lady Delyth Morgan, the chief executive at Breast Cancer Care and
Breast CancerNow.

The research, led by Dr Sara Hurvitz of the University of California in Los Angeles, followed 672 pre-menopausal women under the age of 59 who had advanced hormone receptor-positive, HER2-negative breast cancer.

The patients were assigned either ribociclib, which targets and interferes with processes in the cells that cause cancer to grow, or a placebo. All the women also received hormone therapy.

After 42 months, 70% of those treated with the combination therapy were still alive, compared with 46% of those who received just hormone therapy.

“This is the first study to show improved survival for any targeted therapy when used with endocrine therapy as a first-line treatment for advanced breast cancer,” Hurvitz said. “The use of ribociclib as a frontline therapy significantly prolonged overall survival, which is good news for women with this terrible disease.”

I was 31 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer – it cost me so much

Becca Leaver

Women who received ribociclib lived an average of 23.8 months without the disease progressing, compared with 13 months for those treated with a placebo, the research found.

“We have known for some time that giving ribociclib with an aromatase inhibitor [a hormone therapy] can slow the spread of incurable breast cancer, but to now know that it can also extend life for premenopausal patients is the new hope that so many families have been waiting for,” Delyth said.

“The recent introduction of this class of drugs to NHS care has offered a long-
awaited step forward in our ability to delay the progression of the most common type of incurable breast cancer. It is now absolutely fantastic to see the very first evidence that ribociclib can give thousands of younger women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer more time to live. We cannot put into words what it will mean for so many women to be able to spend precious extra time with their families and create memories that will last a lifetime.

“This class of drugs, and the way it slows cancer growth, represents one of the greatest advances in breast cancer research in recent decades, and it’s vital we ensure that all patients who could benefit are able to access it.”

The study may also stimulate further research into whether the combination of ribociclib and other types of drug that are currently not approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence could help another class of breast cancer patients – those who have received prior hormone therapy.