

Plants could pave the way for new ovarian cancer treatments

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Tropical plants may contain the basis of new and effective treatments for ovarian cancer, according to researchers at the Universities of Strathclyde and Portsmouth.

The scientists are developing a programme for testing plant extracts for the ability to stop cells from ovarian tumours growing. In initial tests, several plant extracts killed the tumour samples, taken from [cancer patients](#).

The extracts are complex mixtures of many different chemicals but ingredients in the plants could be used as starting points for new medicines to tackle the disease. The scientists are now planning further investigation of the most promising compounds.

[Ovarian cancer](#) is the fifth most common cancer in women, affecting more than 6,500 in the UK alone each year. It is also one of the most deadly, killing more than 4,000 women in the UK annually, despite [survival rates](#) nearly doubling in the past 30 years.

The research is an example of the pioneering work of the Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences in developing [new medicines](#) for illnesses and conditions including [infectious diseases](#), cancer, [heart disease](#), and [schizophrenia](#). An £8 million fundraising campaign is underway for the Institute's new £36 million building, to expand and enhance its innovative research and education in medicine discovery, development and use.

Alan Harvey, Professor of Pharmacology at Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, said: "Ovarian cancer's inherent danger to women's health is compounded by the fact that it is notoriously difficult to detect. The disease's high death rates urgently need to be dealt with through safe and potent new treatments.

"Our collection of natural plant samples gives us a broad range of possibilities for treatment and we have had good results from many plants. A great many samples have been studied in our collaboration with Portsmouth and a lot of activity has been detected that wouldn't have been picked up in conventional tests.

"The high throughput screening in the method we have used has produced a high return and we are hoping that more tests will bring new treatments a step closer."

Ian Cree, Professor of Histopathology, Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences at Portsmouth's Institute of Biomedical and Biomolecular Science and Director of the Cancer Laboratory at Queen Alexandra Hospital, said: "This is a first – no one has managed to use cells obtained directly from cancers to screen an entire library of [plant extracts](#) and we are very excited by the results obtained.

"The key now will be to obtain further funding to produce drugs from those samples showing that they can kill cancer cells.

"It should be remembered that drug development is a very lengthy process and that these results, though exciting, are a long way from being used in patients."

Provided by University of Strathclyde

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