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Thursday November 20 2014 | thetimes.co.uk | No 71359

2



I'm a caveman

Robert Crampton savours meat-eating



Wait times are halved for latest NHS drugs

Reforms to bypass traditional clinical trials

Chris Smyth Health Correspondent

Waiting times for cutting-edge drugs will be cut in half under government plans to rip up a "broken" system that has denied many NHS patients life-extending treatments.

Ministers want to bypass traditional clinical trials by using patients as a "test-bed" for promising new drugs, linking their health service data to pharmaceutical company records to discover much more quickly how effective treatments are.

Firms would be paid different prices depending on how well drugs work for individual patients.

Medicines are increasingly being tailored to the genetic make-up of patients. Ministers argue that the system of assessing new treatments is no longer up to the job and that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) needs to catch up.

While charities and drug companies have welcomed the plans, they warn that they will not be a "magic wand" that ends the notorious slowness of the NHS in introducing modern therapies.

There is also likely to be unease about the practicalities, including safety concerns over fast-tracking new treatments, and fear over handing NHS data to drug companies.

Companies take more than a decade to test and get regulatory approval for

patients, arguing that this can cut the £1 billion average cost of developing new drugs, and ease some of the outcry over Nice's refusal to pay for a string of new cancer therapies.

George Freeman, the life sciences minister, told *The Times*: "The one-size-fits-all model of blockbuster drug discovery is ending — to be replaced by a new generation of personalised drugs designed around our genetic profile and medical data.

"This will transform the landscape of drug development from the 20th century model to a world in which the NHS becomes a partner in innovation: testing, proving and adopting new drugs and devices in research studies with real patients.

"With accurate data we can then start to measure — and pay by — results and health outcomes."

Mr Freeman will launch a review today into the role of Nice and the safety regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, aiming to produce recommendations for radical change early next year.

He said that patients must "get access to new life-saving drugs years faster than they do now," promising that this would save hundreds of lives a year.

Doctors were at present practising "blind medicine", where they prescribed on the basis of average responses rather than personalised data.

Mr Freeman, a minister in both the



Kelly Tolhurst, the Tory hopeful, campaigning yesterday in the Rochester

Ukip says more Tories

Laura Pitel Political Correspondent

Two Conservative MPs are considering defecting to Ukip, Mark Reckless claimed last night on the eve of the Rochester & Strood by-election.

The former Tory hopes that voters will send him back to Westminster today under a purple banner. He is expected to claim victory in the former Conservative stronghold, delivering a blow to David Cameron and a boost to Ukip five months before the election.

think they will want to see what result is before making any decision he said. "One of them I had discussed [with] by telephone and the other in a location not in the constituency.

The news will send jitters through Tory ranks as the party fights Ukip.

The claim came as a key ally of Merkel said that Germany would grant the UK a temporary brake on immigrant numbers, denting Cameron's hopes of renegotiating Britain's relationship with Europe. C