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Cancer pill plan

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BRIGID O'CONNELL
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AUSTRALIAN researchers are developing a hormone tablet to prevent ovarian cancer by piggybacking on the way pregnancy, breastfeeding and the contraceptive pill all dramatically reduce the risk of the deadly disease.

Three researchers were yesterday awarded a share of \$1.5 million from the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation to devise better treatments for the four Australian women diagnosed with ovarian cancer every day.

In most women, the cancer returns and becomes resistant to chemotherapy.

Associate Professor Pradeep Tanwar, from the University of Newcastle, has been given \$566,000 to exploit the established link between hormones and the risk of ovarian cancer – with progesterone suppressing and oestrogen promoting the growth of cancer cells – to develop the first prevention.

“Reproductive health plays

an important role in whether you get ovarian cancer, even if you have a family history,” Prof Tanwar said.

“We now want to look at the compounds already used for other conditions, such as fibroids, infertility or inducing ovulation in IVF, to see if they have a prevention benefit.”

Melbourne’s Dr Maree Bilandzic, from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research, has been awarded almost \$800,000 to screen drugs already on pharmacy shelves – treatments used for everything from fungal infections, other cancers, and anti-nausea therapies – to test their hidden potential to fight ovarian cancer.

Dr Bilandzic is targeting the “leader cells” – cells that survive and thrive in the face of chemotherapy – and investigating ways to overcome them by repurposing other medications.

Queensland Associate Professor Jason Lee, from the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, has also been funded to develop a new drug to make tumours more sensitive to chemotherapy.