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Light of hope for cancers

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A LIGHT therapy used to treat skin cancer and sunspots is emerging as a promising treatment for reaching cancer cells deep in the body, with Melbourne researchers finding the first evidence of its ability to kill ovarian tumours.

Ovarian cancer is notoriously deadly because it generally has few symptoms before becoming advanced.

Less than half of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer will live more than five years after diagnosis as most patients ultimately become resistant to standard chemotherapies.

But a study from Melbourne's Hudson Institute of Medical Research has found that a new photodynamic light therapy is able to dramatically shrink ovarian cancers in mice while sparing the surrounding healthy tissue.

The treatment works by giving the patient a drug containing a light-sensitive com-

pound – intravenously for solid tumours and as a skin cream for treating melanoma.

These compounds sit inert in the cancer cells until a specific wavelength of light is shone on them, causing a reaction in the tumour.

In mice, it was able to halve the size of ovarian tumours in three weeks.

Lead researcher Dr Andrew Stephens said it was believed the Photosoft Technology worked in two ways – first by triggering instant cell death and secondly by rallying the immune system to continue attacking the cancer.

Dr Stephens said given ovarian cancer was resistant to traditional and some new types of treatment – such as immunotherapy, which was revolutionising outcomes for blood cancer and melanoma – this looked like a new and promising way of evoking the immune system to provide a more sustained attack against the cancer.