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Patients can see the light

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EXCLUSIVE
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SURGERY, pills and injections could soon be a thing of the past as light emerges as a new way of treating cancer and soft tissue injuries without pain or side effects.

Light treatments, which have been compared to the medical therapies used in science fiction series Star Trek, have undergone 500 controlled medical studies, with many showing it works.

Clinical trials that use light to kill skin cancers are set to begin in Australia this year, and a robot has just been developed by Melbourne's Swinburne University that uses

light to treat soft tissue injuries.

Researchers in Australia are at the forefront of these treatments, which could be used for everything from migraines and bad backs to ovarian cancer.

Dr Andrew Stephens from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne has trialled a new photodynamic drug being developed by the Invion company IVX-PO2, a modified form of chlorophyll from plants, to kill ovarian cancer cells in petrie dishes.

"We've done lots of testing in the lab and it has been very effective at killing tumour cells. It's not a case of will it or won't it work, it's a case of how effective it will be," he said.

When the patient is exposed to light beams of a cer-

tain wavelength the photosensitiser becomes toxic to the cancer cells. Unlike previous treatments it does not require patients to be locked in a darkened room for weeks or months after treatment.

At Swinburne University, scientists have developed a robot that uses light to treat soft tissue injuries and chronic pain. The robot combines a thermal camera that identifies inflammation in the body and a laser to relieve inflammation and control pain. Adelaide GP Dr Mark Rogers is involved in the company behind the robot and currently uses light therapy to treat migraines, sprained ankles and fibromyalgia.