

Another way to save lives

By CLAIRE SADLER

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WA-led study finds a way around a chronic global shortage of cancer drug

CLAIRE SADLER

When Jack Taylor was diagnosed with high-risk bladder cancer at only 20 years old, being told there was a shortage of the potentially life-saving drug he needed was an extra blow.

Bladder cancer immune therapy drug Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG), has been subject to shortages across the world since 2013 because of manufacturing issues, meaning patients are missing out on what doctors consider the gold standard treatment for the disease.

However, a WA-led trial could solve the issue, with the results revealing using the chemotherapy drug mitomycin on top of BCG — meaning not as much of the drug was needed — was a safe and effective alternative treatment.

It means doctors will be able to

treat patients with this cancer therapy from now on.

The trial recruited 501 patients across 17 sites in Australia, including Fiona Stanley

Hospital, and the UK between 2013 and 2023.

The addition of mitomycin meant patients required 40 per cent less doses of BCG. Patients also completed their treatment more frequently, suggesting a combination treatment was better tolerated. Bladder cancer is the 11th most common cancer in the country with the survival rate five years after diagnosis only being 57 per cent.

Mr Taylor, pictured, had no signs he was unwell until he noticed blood in his urine — a month later he was diagnosed with bladder cancer.

“It’s the last thing you expect

as a 20-year-old really. I was a bit in shock and quite uncertain about the future,” he said.

“When I got diagnosed, you’re already stressed enough and then when you get told there’s this potentially life-saving, disease-altering treatment but you might not be able to get it — it’s pretty soul crushing.”

He was referred to FSH for the trial after having surgery.

He still has three months left of BCG treatment but he said being a part of the trial meant he experienced fewer side effects and was feeling well.

FSH head of urology Dickon Hayne said this treatment could dramatically expand access to life-saving treatment.

“We did look at a subgroup of patients who had the nastiest sort of cancer in that group, and those patients did seem to do better in terms of the cancer being treated when we added the mitomycin,” he said.

