

BMS cancer drug offers hope at high costs

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Singapore: The closely-watched Bristol-Myers cancer drug went on sale in Japan recently, offering new hope to cancer patients at steep costs.

The average annual cost for this drug per patient sums up to \$143,000. The drug Opdivo, is marketed in Japan by Bristol's marketing partner-Ono pharmaceuticals.

The new drug is a PD-1 inhibitor that harnesses the body's immune system to fight tumors, including melanoma. Amid mounting concerns regarding higher costs of life-saving drugs, debate about pricing reached a peak this year with the launch of an expensive new drug for hepatitis C by Gilead lifesciences.

Health officials and private insurers argued that expensive treatments were straining health budgets. Mr J Leonard Lichtenfeld, deputy chief medical officer, American Cancer Society, said "Though PD-1 drugs are game changers, higher prices for new cancer drugs have become an increasing concern for patients and their families."

Ono pharmaceuticals stated that the price tag was determined with Ono's negotiations with the Japanese National Health Insurance system, which sets introductory prices for new drugs.

The firm said that considering the average weight of a Japanese patient weight as 132 pounds, the annual cost for the treatment would come to \$143,000.