

Industry wouldn't fund cancer drug, so Alberta town rode to the rescue

Last Updated: Thursday, October 4, 2007 | 10:12 AM ET

[CBC News](#)

Even though the drug shrinks cancerous tumours, no pharmaceutical companies wanted to fund human trials because they couldn't make enough money selling it. And that's when Peace River stepped in.

To date, the town in northwestern Alberta has collected \$250,000 — a large chunk of the \$800,000 in grants and donations generated worldwide to fund the clinical trial of dichloroacetate, or DCA.

DCA has been in use for decades. But it has recently been shown to fight cancer by attacking the metabolism of malignant tumours in studies on rats.

In January 2007, the academic journal *Cancer Cell* published a University of Alberta doctor's findings that showed the compound shrinks tumours without damaging healthy cells. But because the drug sells for so little, at \$2 a dose, no drug company was willing to support human trials and DCA's patent expired.

So people in Peace River began their fundraising campaign.

"It was a very simple decision for us to do," one of the primary fundraisers in the town, radio station owner Terry Babiy, told CBC News on Wednesday.

"We just talked about it and did it."

Town 'touched by cancer'

The Canadian Tire in the town followed Babiy's lead by holding a car show, McDonald's sold DCA McFlurries, and the local grocery store pledged \$50,000 through its customer rewards program, he said.

As well, students raised money through bottle drives and people brought in money through golf tournaments and barbeques.

"That's the community, Everyone is touched by cancer in some way," said local resident Don Jennings.

Residents of Grimshaw, a town close to Peace River, also raised more than \$100,000 toward the research.

Fundraisers praised when human trials approved

When the University of Alberta scientists announced on Sept. 26 that it would be beginning human trials, the researchers applauded the efforts of the ordinary people in Peace River and elsewhere who rallied to raise money for the cause.

"It should inspire other places to develop generic drugs without the support of the industry," lead investigator Dr. Evangelos Michelakis said at a news conference.

Health Canada approved DCA for the limited trial on people with an aggressive form of brain cancer called glioblastoma. The researchers are looking for 50 patients in Edmonton who have already tried chemotherapy, surgery or radiation with no success. The drug is to be tested over the next 18 months.

Scientists predict that it will take millions of dollars and years of research to determine whether the drug is truly effective in treating cancer in humans.



DCA has been in use for decades. But it has recently been shown to fight cancer by attacking the metabolism of malignant tumours in studies on rats. (CBC)



Peace River has raised \$250,000 for DCA clinical trials through its fundraising campaign. (CBC)