Team’s war on deadly cancer gets cash boost

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The WINDOW* Consortium, a collaboration between researchers in Cambridge and Amsterdam, has won a £1.5 million (€1.75 million) grant from The Brain Tumour Charity (UK) to research drugs that more effectively target an aggressive brain tumour known as glioblastoma.

Glioblastomas are resistant to treatment, probably because the cells within the tumour are not all of the same type. This is known as ‘heterogeneity’.

Current treatment is surgery to remove as much of the tumour as possible followed by chemotherapy and radiotherapy. But glioblastoma have

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patients, will analyse how 100 drug combinations, all of which are clinically approved, can be uniquely matched to an individual tumour cells.

Cells from patients will be harvested and prepared in a University of Cambridge laboratory at Addenbrooke’s Hospital, overseen by Dr Colin Watts, a consultant neurosurgeon and clinical scientist. These will be passed to the VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam to identify the most effective cancer-busting drug-combinations.

A team led by Emmanouil Metzakopian from the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute (UK) will use new technology to identify molecular targets contributing to drug resistance.

Data that shows most promise create a Glioblastoma Drug Bank by IOTA Pharmaceuticals, led by David Bailey and Fredrik Svensson in Cambridge and be shared worldwide.

The integrated approach will accelerate the development of new combination therapies and development of new molecular approaches to treat glioblastoma.

Dr Watts said: “We are very thankful to the Brain Tumour Charity for this funding. By collaborating with our colleagues in Amsterdam, the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and IOTA Pharmaceuticals, we can fast track looking at the efficacy of new drug combinations in treating glioblastoma.

“This will hopefully bring real hope for patients in the future, as at the moment they have very poor outcomes due to how aggressive this brain tumour is.”

Research leader Bart Westerman, of the VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, added: “This grant from the Brain Tumour Charity enables our international team to mount a direct attack on this deadly disease.”

“Our strategy will combat this cancer from a cellular point of view. Novel drug therapies coming from specialties such as immuno-oncology will further complement the WINDOW approach.”

Business leader and philanthropist Jack Morris CBE, lost his daughter Emily in January this year, aged just 31, and is a vital supporter of The Brain Tumour Charity.

“Emily’s glioblastoma brain tumour diagnosis was a devastating time in our lives and we were introduced to a world that was completely alien to us,” Mr Morris said.

“Like many other parents in a similar situation, I spent a long time studying the subject that I needed to know about.
“That is why The Brain Tumour Charity’s research funding towards the WINDOW Consortium will be so important, in working to help all those going through similar devastating experiences.”

Mr Morris continued: “We know that brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and people under 40 in the UK and survival rates have not improved significantly over the last 40 years.

“This has to change and The Charity’s partnership with the WINDOW consortium is part of their strategy to make this happen.”