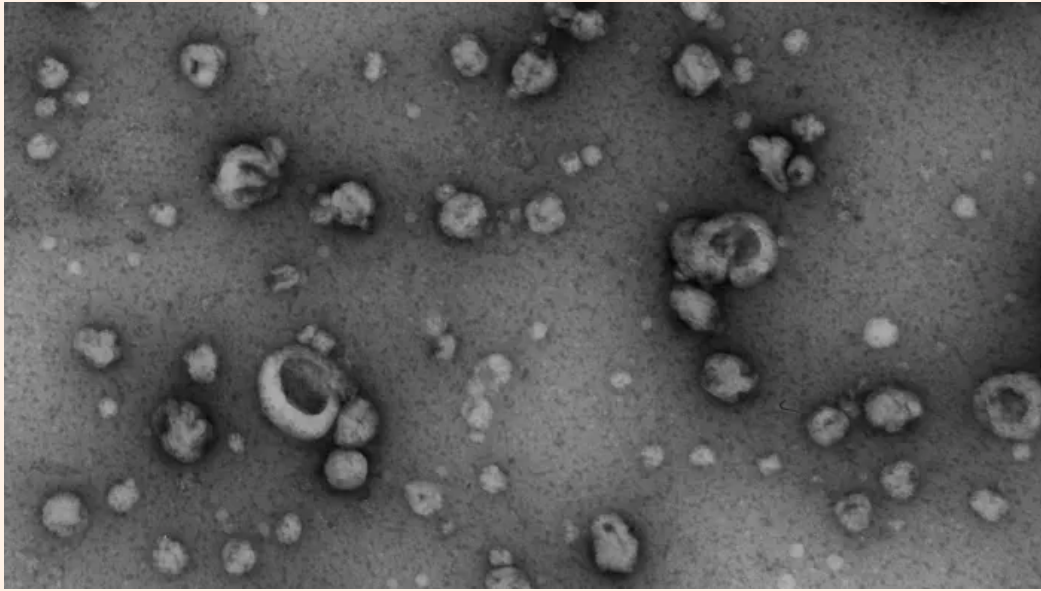


Oxford

Scientists offer to name cancer drug for £1m



A cancer cell as seen through a microscope © John Lee

Andrew Jack in London AUGUST 31 2012

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It is the gift for those who have everything. Swedish medical researchers are offering to name an experimental cancer drug after anyone willing to donate £1m to fund their work.

Academics at [Uppsala university](#) are offering private donors the chance to name the treatment for neuroendocrine cancer, the rare form of the disease that killed [Steve Jobs, the Apple founder](#).

Fundraisers hope to cover the £2m cost of a trial in up to 20 patients of a genetically modified common cold virus, designed specifically to fight cancer, reflecting growing scientific interest in the use of such viruses to combat the disease.

Magnus Essand, professor of gene therapy, said: "We have developed a virus that was effective in mice, but it's been in the freezer for the past two years because the trials in humans are too expensive for an academic centre."

Prof Essand's early publication of his research means he cannot claim a patent on it, thus making it unattractive to biotech companies. The sums involved are too great for his university and the usual public Swedish or European supporters of research and he hopes his [Virus Oncolytic Fund](#) will bridge the gap.

Donors have long attached their names to research foundations, buildings and even abstract objects in space. Oxford mathematician Marcus de Sautoy offered to name [symmetries in hyperspace](#) after people in exchange for a £10 charitable donation. Some medicines even include a reference to the inventor as part of their name.

But given the high failure rate of medicines in clinical trials, the donor would likely soon be relegated to a footnote in the scientific literature. It is also unlikely that any drug will be named after them. World Health Organisation officials who regulate the generic names given to drugs cautioned that a person's name would not contain sufficient accurate detail about the treatment.

The Swedish virus – one of dozens being studied for different applications in cancer – would be injected into tumours, exploding the cells and boosting the body's own immune response in fighting cancer.

The naming idea came from Alexander Masters, a British writer who has been seeking new forms of treatment for a friend with neuroendocrine cancer. He became frustrated that experimental therapies were not being made available to patients because of lack of funding. He had previously failed to generate any interest from Apple, which had revealed little on Mr Job's illness in recent years.

"When I was travelling in universities in the US, everything I saw had someone's name on it," he said. "We need a philanthropic banker to give money and who wants it known. You take a gamble on what's not an unreasonable sum."

Professor John Bell, a leading Canadian cancer researcher who described such oncolytic viruses as "a very promising and safe field", said: "Getting funding is really challenging. All the time in North America you see the naming of hospital cancer wings, so naming a drug is a clever idea."