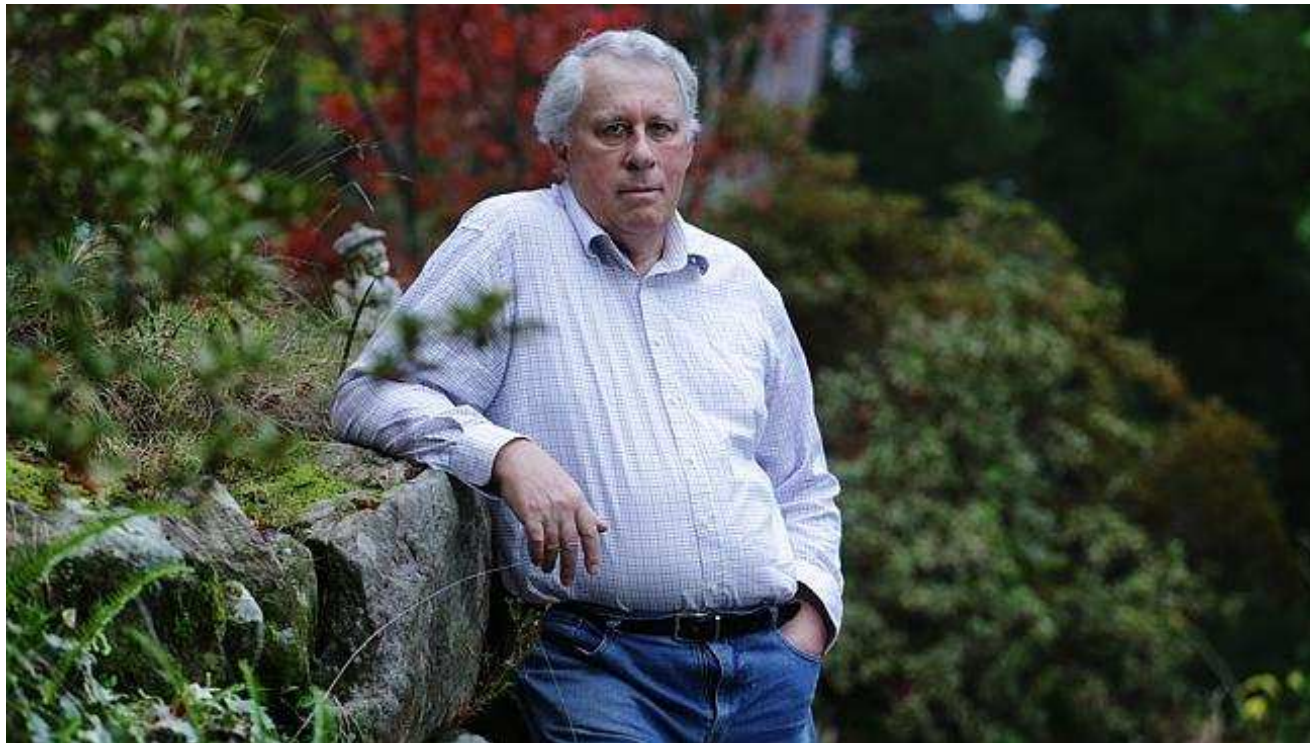


Government website sees clinical trial doors open for patients

SEAN PARNELL THE AUSTRALIAN MAY 20, 2015 12:00AM



Tony Maxwell, prostate cancer survivor and trial drug participant, at home in Sydney's Dural. Picture: Britta Campion. Source: News Corp Australia

The Abbott government will seek to bolster medical research by helping patients access clinical trials for new drugs and therapies.

With almost half of all phase three clinical trials in Australia failing to meet recruitment targets, the government has opted for an online register of clinical trials that patients can search for opportunities.

Health Minister Sussan Ley yesterday said the website would also provide information for - researchers, doctors and sponsors, but most importantly had the potential to offer patients hope at a time when other avenues had been exhausted.

“This reform will provide Australians right across the country, including regional and rural - patients, greater access to clinical trials and will help to improve health outcomes,” Ms Ley said.

Tony Maxwell is in a clinical trial taking the drug enzalutamide to keep his advanced prostate cancer at bay. After he was diagnosed in 2003, he expected a radical prostatectomy to see him through, but his PSA levels remained high after the operation. That led to hormone treatment, more scans, and eventually the discovery of cancer in a pelvic lymph node.

In the clinical trial, Mr Maxwell's PSA levels have fallen from 70 to 10 or thereabouts since June, and there are further options in stage two of the trial.

“You’re constantly trying to buy time, ducking and weaving and seeing what things are available and are manageable in terms of cost,” the 69 year-old said yesterday.

While Mr Maxwell keeps well-informed, he worries for those who are more naive about their options and might not seize the opportunity of a clinical trial.

“A lot of the researchers are pretty bloody hopeless at writing something in plain English too,” Mr Maxwell said.

The number of clinical trials conducted in Australia fell 7 per cent between 2012 and 2013, with a lack of participants one factor. The launch of the website — AustralianClinicalTrials.gov.au — is a cost-effective solution for the government amid ongoing uncertainty in the research sector due to cutbacks and new priorities.

The federal budget reaffirmed the government’s commitment to a \$20 billion Medical Research Future Fund, with the first distribution of \$10 million next year. Ms Ley said her department had worked with the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Department of Industry and Science on the website.

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