



## Stopping steroids, starving cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and the number of sufferers is on the rise. Recent research by Sterix Ltd, a University spin-out company, has brought us closer to developing a treatment that targets women who get the disease after going through the menopause.

Some breast cancers need oestrogen to grow. Although post-menopausal women have stopped producing the hormone, they still produce an enzyme, called steroid sulfatase, and this creates steroids with oestrogen-like properties, which many cancers can use.

The new drug, called STX64 (BN83495), works by inhibiting steroid sulfatase and starving the tumour. Other anti-hormone therapies for breast cancer are available but women often develop resistance to them; early findings suggest that STX64 may provide an additional treatment option. In the latest stage, patients have been recruited and dosed as part of clinical trials.

Sterix Ltd was founded on the pioneering medicinal chemistry work of Professor Barry Potter of the Department of Pharmacy & Pharmacology at Bath and the steroid biochemistry expertise of Professor Mike Reed of the School of Medicine at Imperial College, London.

A single drug candidate synthesised at Bath in the early 1990s, which led to a patent, laid the cornerstone of the whole business. In 2004, Sterix was acquired by the pharmaceutical company Ipsen, which then provided the University with a grant of £4.2 million to continue its Sterix-led research. An additional major grant was awarded in 2007.

Professor Potter said: "Without the spin-out company route we would have really struggled to get our research out of the lab at all.

"There is a growing trend of pharmaceutical companies outsourcing science research and such academic-industrial partnerships are efficient for them and give academics the freedom to nurture innovative ideas with the resources to take them forward."

