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## Drug battle win verdict

'ECSTATIC' was how Fred Barnes felt yesterday after wife, Maureen, won her battle for treatment with a pioneering cancer drug.

The couple were spending a restful Valentine's Day after two months' wrangling with health officials over funding needed for Alimta – the only drug licenced to treat Maureen's rare form of asbestos-related lung cancer.

Mrs Barnes, 61, of Portland Grove, Chinley, won her appeal against Derbyshire County Primary Care Trust's decision on Tuesday.

She said: "Now I just want to start my treatment. I am exhausted.

### Thanks

"I want to thank so many people for their support, I don't know where to begin."

Maureen was diagnosed with mesothelioma before Christmas and was due to be treated by specialists at Wythenshawe Hospital. But she became the latest victim of the NHS postcode-lottery when Derbyshire County PCT refused to fund the chemotherapy.

Alimta is funded routinely for people who live in Manchester.

Fred Barnes, 71, said: "We had a very good interview with the appeal panel. They were most courteous.

"We took a petition with us. It had 6,167 names which was beyond belief. I think we put up a good fight."

Derbyshire County PCT said: "The PCT has upheld the appeal due to some very specific circumstances for this patient.

"For reasons of patient confidentiality, the PCT is not able to provide any further comment on the specific details of this appeal."

Tony Whitston of Greater Manchester Asbestos Support Group represented Mrs Barnes at the appeal.

He said: "I am over the moon. I am delighted. It was a fair hearing and a just decision.

"I think the panel should be congratulated".

Mr Whitston said the panel were persuaded Maureen had not been given a fair hearing when the initial decision was made.

He said: "We challenged them on points of procedure. They had not taken into account Mrs Barnes' individual circumstances."

He said Maureen spoke very poignantly at the appeal, hammering home that she was young and fit and exactly the sort of person who most benefits from the treatment.

Faced with the clinical evidence she said she could not believe the PCT could still refuse her funding.

Tony added: "It's a pity that the PCT do not accept the view of senior consultants at Wythenshawe who routinely treat people with Alimta.

"And the most perverse thing is that the appeal process probably costs as much as Maureen's treatment, not to mention all the distress it caused."

Dr Carol Dunn, who campaigned for her friend Maureen's treatment, said: "Although the build-up to the appeal was traumatic and emotionally draining for Maureen, the appeal itself was fair and just.

"The panel appeared to be objective, giving equal weight and consideration to the views of all parties.

"As a doctor, it is reassuring to experience first-hand that democracy, fairness, and equality of service provision, does ultimately over-ride local policies."

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