

# Cancer patients gain access

By ADAM IPSEN

BOWEL cancer patients will not have to travel to Melbourne for life-extending treatment, if Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH) approves use of the Avastin cancer treatment drug.

LRH is looking into providing Avastin, a drug used to treat advanced bowel cancer and stop tumors from spreading.

The drug was unavailable in Gippsland hospitals because it was not covered under the pharmaceutical benefits scheme (PBS).

But the Federal Government announced last week Avastin would be added to the PBS to treat bowel cancer from 1 July 2009.

While Avastin is off the PBS, public hospitals can only provide

it by paying more than \$20,000 per patient — the cost of the drug.

Hospital CEO Peter Craighead said the drug was highly anticipated and the hospital would look into providing it.

"Before any pharmaceuticals are approved by the hospital, they must go through rigorous scrutiny," Mr Craighead said.

He said he understood the

financial hardships many bowel cancer sufferers faced and welcomed the new possibility of an affordable treatment.

Medical oncologist John Scarlett said the announcement was good news for many bowel cancer patients.

"We have to see what patients are eligible (for Avastin)... but at least for some patients it seems like it will be good news," Dr Scarlett said.