**GOOD HEALTH**

These two women have pancreatic cancer — but there’s a reason their prognoses are very different...

The cancer that means even TWO WEEKS’ wait for surgery wrecks a patient’s chances

By JENNIE AGG

Contrasting experiences: Frances Heinemann (top left) Erika Vincent

the cancer had spread outside the pancreas, but not yet to other areas of the body (Erika’s is stage four, meaning it has spread to other organs).

For Frances, the scan revealed nothing — she is now in the middle of six rounds of chemotherapy.

‘I’m playing the violin again and we’re trying to get on, ’ she adds.

***The girls keep me going. ’***

To improve outcomes, experts want doctors to ‘fast-track’ patients for surgery.

The approach in our hospital is that as long as a patient is walking around, looking after themselves and satisfies the anaesthetist, we will operate, ’ says Mr Roberts.

Many patients with pancreatic cancer have a stent fitted to open up bowel passages, so they can eat, and to alleviate jaundice.

Mr Roberts claims this is not always necessary, can cause complications, such as infection, and delays treatment of the cancer.

A small study of patients who did not have a stent, published last year in the journal HPB, found that this ‘fast-track’ approach improved the chances of removing the tumour.

When we operate quickly, in two to three weeks and without fitting a stent, in 95 per cent of cases we’re able to remove the tumour, compared with about 75 per cent of cases on the old pathway,’ says Mr Roberts.

If every hospital adopted this fast-track surgery, it would be a massive step.

Erika convinced her doctors to start her on chemotherapy and has so far defied the odds.

A scan last month revealed that the tumours have shrunk and she is considering a type of experimental surgery called MRC’s nanoknife, privately.

She’s also considering a type of hyperthermia treatment, which involves using a high-intensity ultrasound beam to kill cancer cells in the area...