

Combinations work better



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RESEARCHERS have found that combination therapy, including those involving experimental treatment agents, may help treat patients with advanced breast cancer, according to multiple reports presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Two of the presented studies focused on the experimental treatment trastuzumab-DM1 (T-DM1) and demonstrated its effectiveness for women with advanced HER2-positive breast cancers.

The findings of one study, presented by Kathy Miller, MD, associate professor of medicine at the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center, found that T-DM1 with or without pertuzumab has some effectiveness for women with advanced HER2-positive breast cancers previously treated with trastuzumab.

A second study, led by Patricia LoRusso, DO, professor of medicine at the Karmanos Cancer Institute, found that retesting a breast cancer tumor for possible

The results supported evidence of effective treatments for patients who have advanced cancer.

changes in HER2 expression could predict the effectiveness of T-DM1. “This agent is beginning to stand out as a treatment for women who have been heavily pretreated for metastatic breast cancer,” noted Sumanta Pal, MD, assistant professor of oncology at the City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Adding everolimus (Afinitor) to the chemotherapy regimen of women with metastatic breast cancer may result in clinical benefits, according to another study presented by Fabrice Andre, MD, assistant professor of medicine at the Institut Gustav Roussy, France. He and other researchers found that everolimus lessens the resistance to treatment in patients whose cancer is no longer sensitive to paclitaxel and trastuzumab. “These are interesting studies that show combining everolimus with chemotherapy and other target agents is feasible with promising results,” said Edith Perez, MD, professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic.

Another study on everolimus, presented by P.K. Morrow, MD, assistant professor of medicine at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, found that adding everolimus to therapy resulted in clinical benefit for more than one-third of patients. The findings supported the results from Dr. Andre’s study.

The collective results show that combination therapy is feasible and add to evidence supporting effective treatments for advanced breast cancer patients. ■

Ipilimumab beneficial for metastatic melanoma

PATIENTS with metastatic melanoma experience improved survival with ipilimumab, according to a study presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Led by F. Stephen Hodi, MD, of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, researchers studied 676 patients with unresectable stage III or IV melanoma that progressed during therapy for metastatic disease. Participants were randomized to receive double-blind treatment with ipilimumab 3 mg/kg with or without the glycoprotein 100 (gp100) vaccine every 3 weeks for up to four induction treatments or the vaccine alone. The patients’ tumors were positive for HLA-A*0201, the protein against which the vaccine causes an immune response.

Ipilimumab extended median survival to 10.1 months in refractory malignant melanoma compared with 6.4 months with a gp100 peptide therapeutic vaccine.

According to background information provided by the authors, ipilimumab removes the “brakes” on the immune system’s attack on melanoma by blocking the molecule that acts as a checkpoint to down-regulate T-cell activation pathways.

The findings were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (2010 June 14. [Epub ahead of print]). ■

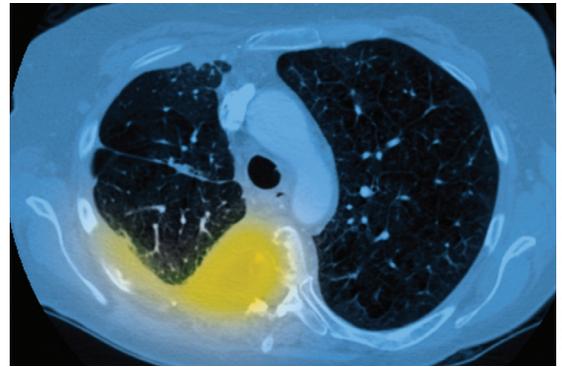
Non-small cell lung cancer therapy has mixed results

TARGETED agents may improve outcomes for patients with advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), according to studies presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

In one significant study presented at the meeting, researchers showed that crizotinib, a novel targeted therapy, can shrink tumors in about 90% of patients with advanced disease. Patients had a 72% chance of being progression-free at 6 months after starting the therapy, given orally at 250 mg twice a day. Additionally, the majority of patients experienced tumor shrinkage by more than 30%, and some saw their cancers disappear.

In a second study involving 670 patients with stage IIIB or IV disease, the targeted agent, erlotinib (Tarceva), was used to treat older patients with advanced NSCLC. Researchers found that erlotinib prolonged survival in women with the disease but not in men with the disease. According to Siow Ming Lee, MD, PhD, of the University College London Cancer Institute, erlotinib prolonged survival by 26% in older women, but male patients participating in the study saw no benefit.

Results from a third study found that the addition of vandetanib (Zactima) to docetaxel resulted in only a slight benefit for patients with advanced NSCLC that had



Non-small cell lung cancer on CT scan

progressed following first-line chemotherapy. According to findings published in *Lancet Oncology* (2010; doi:10.1016/S1470-2045[10]70132-7), the addition of vandetanib to docetaxel added an average of 2 weeks to progression-free survival.

In current studies, researchers are moving toward finding targeted therapies that will produce optimal outcomes for patients with NSCLC. ■

Various chemotherapy regimens show promise

IN MULTIPLE studies presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, research teams reported the development of novel chemotherapeutic agents while other groups demonstrated that aggressive chemotherapy treatments do not appear to cause new safety concerns in certain patients.

In one study of 762 women with locally recurrent or metastatic breast cancer presented by Christopher Twelves, MBChB, PhD, of the University of Leeds and St. James' University Hospital in Leeds, UK, researchers found that eribulin, a novel chemotherapy drug derived from a sea sponge, improved survival in women with

Aggressive treatments do not appear to cause new safety concerns in surgical patients.

heavily-pretreated metastatic breast cancer. Specifically, median survival rose to 13.12 months with eribulin compared with 10.65 months on chemotherapeutic, biologic, or endocrine therapy.

In a study involving a new chemotherapeutic agent, women with relapsed, platinum-sensitive ovarian cancer had a 70% overall response rate to treatment with a taxane plus farletuzumab, an antifolate receptor antibody. "Compared to historical progression-free and platinum-free intervals, farletuzumab increases the overall response rate and the duration of second interval when combined with carboplatin and a taxane," said Allan J. White, MD, of South

Texas Oncology and Hematology at The START Center.

Another study, led by Salah-Eddin Al-Batran, MD, assistant professor of medicine at the Klinik für Onkologie und Hamatologie, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, reported that docetaxel can be added to a combination chemotherapy treatment in patients older than 65 years without risking intolerable adverse side effects.

An additional study, conducted to investigate the safety profile of chemotherapy treatments, found that the addition of bevacizumab (Avastin) did not appear to cause new safety concerns among patients undergoing surgery for gastric cancers. ■