Unknown Primary - Latest Research

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [1], April / 2013

Latest Research

ON THIS PAGE: You will read about the scientific research being done now to learn more about this type of cancer and how to treat it. To see other pages in this guide, use the colored boxes on the right side of your screen, or click ?Next? at the bottom.

Doctors are working to learn more about CUP, ways to prevent cancer, how to best treat CUP, and how to provide the best care to people diagnosed with this disease. The following areas of research may include new options for patients through clinical trials [2]. Always talk with your doctor about the diagnostic and treatment options best for you.

Using tumor genetics to diagnose the primary site. Different tissues within the body make different proteins, depending on the genes that are active (this is called gene expression). For example, some of the genes expressed by normal lung cells are different from those expressed by normal colon cells. When cancers develop in these organs, they usually have the same organ-specific pattern of gene expression. It is now possible to analyze a tumor sample from a biopsy to find the genes being expressed, which can help predict the place where the cancer began.

As mentioned in the Treatment Options [3] section, site-specific treatment based on molecular tumor profiling prediction is in the process of replacing empiric chemotherapy as the standard treatment for patients with CUP who do not fit into any of the specific subgroups described. Ongoing clinical trials are further examining the outcome of assay-directed treatment, in order to establish its role in treating CUP.

Targeted therapy. As outlined in the Treatment Options [3] section, targeted therapy is directed at specific molecular abnormalities within the cancer cell or the surrounding tissue environment that contributes to cancer growth and survival. These abnormalities include gene mutations in the cancer, and abnormal activity of various signaling proteins within the cancer cell. Several targeted therapies are already approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for specific cancers, either used alone or with chemotherapy. In addition, most of the new cancer drugs in development are targeted in this way.

Research shows that not all tumors have the same targets. Most targeted treatments are effective only in cancer cells carrying the specific target. More research needs to be done in CUP to identify how frequently various targets are present. Clinical trials have recently been started, and it is likely that additional treatment options will be identified for some CUP patients. Learn more about targeted treatments [4].

New types of treatment. Patients with CUP that no longer responds to the standard treatment may want to consider clinical trials that test new types of treatment, called phase I clinical trials [5]. The goals of these studies are to find the side effects and best doses for these new drugs, as well as to learn if they are effective against cancer.

Supportive care. Clinical trials are underway to find better ways of reducing symptoms and side effects of current cancer treatments in order to improve patients? comfort and quality of life.

To find clinical trials specific to your diagnosis, talk with your doctor or search online clinical trial databases now [6].

To continue reading this guide, choose ?Next? (below, right) to see a section about coping with the side effects of the disease or its treatment. Or, use the colored boxes located on the right side of your screen to visit any section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/19693
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/19692
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24729
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24880
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24878