New Targeted Therapy for Advanced Melanoma Lengthens Patients' Lives [1]

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A recent study showed that the drug trametinib slowed tumor growth and lengthened the lives of patients who have advanced melanoma with a *BRAF* gene mutation (change). Trametinib is a type of treatment called targeted therapy. Targeted therapy targets the cancer's specific genes, proteins, or the tissue environment that contributes to cancer growth and survival. Currently, there is one targeted therapy approved to treat melanoma that targets the *BRAF* gene, called vemurafenib (Zelboraf). However, vemurafenib eventually stops controlling melanoma growth for most patients, highlighting the need for other treatment options. Trametinib targets the MEK protein, which affects melanoma growth similarly to a mutated *BRAF* gene, which is why researchers are studying this treatment for melanoma.

The patients who participated in this study had advanced melanoma with a *BRAF* mutation and had received either one treatment or no treatment before the study began. During the study, they received trametinib or standard chemotherapy with either dacarbazine (DTIC-Dome) or paclitaxel (Taxol). Trametinib slowed or stopped melanoma growth for 22% of patients receiving the drug, compared with 8% of those who received chemotherapy.

Trametinib also lengthened the amount of time it took for the melanoma to worsen by a little more than three months when compared with chemotherapy. After six months, 81% of patients taking trametinib were living with the disease, compared with 67% of those who received chemotherapy. Because trametinib worked so well to control melanoma growth in this study, almost half of the patients who had their disease worsen while receiving chemotherapy were

switched to trametinib.

The side effects of trametinib were generally manageable for patients in this study and included rashes, eye problems, high blood pressure, and reduced heart function.

What this means for patients

"This is the first in a new type of targeted drugs that could benefit patients with melanoma who have *BRAF* gene mutations. The findings show that blocking the MEK protein is an effective treatment for many people with the disease," said lead author Caroline Robert, MD, PhD, Head of Dermatology at the Institute Gustave Roussy in Paris, France. "Trametinib is likely to become another initial treatment option for patients with advanced melanoma." Because research on trametinib is ongoing, it is currently only available in clinical trials. It's important to talk with your doctor about all treatment options for melanoma, including clinical trials.

What to Ask Your Doctor

- What stage of melanoma do I have? What does this mean?
- Will tests be needed to find out if there are any gene mutations involved in my melanoma?
- What are my treatment options?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- Will targeted therapy be a part of my treatment plan?
- What are the possible side effects? How can they be managed?

For More Information

Guide to Melanoma [2]

Understanding Targeted Treatments [3]

Skin Reactions to Targeted Therapies [4]

Managing Side Effects [5]

Links
[1] http://www.cancer.net/new-targeted-therapy-advanced-melanoma-lengthens-patients-lives
[2] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Melanoma
[3] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Cancer.Net+Feature+Articles/Treatments%2C+Tests%2C+and+Procedures/Understanding+Targeted+Treatments
[4] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects/Skin+Reactions+to+Targeted+Therapies
[5] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects