

Cancer Advances: Low-Dose Interferon Fails to Improve Survival in High-Risk Melanoma Patients

Posted online on December 9, 2003 on www.jco.org [1] [Read the Study](#) [2] For the last decade, high-dose interferon, a common treatment for melanoma, has been considered the standard therapy for high-risk melanoma patients who, despite having undergone surgery, still have a significant risk of their disease returning. However, conflicting research on the effectiveness of interferon, and physician and patient concerns about the many side effects associated with it, have caused considerable debate over the available treatment options for melanoma patients. As a result, researchers wanted to see whether lower doses of the drug given over a longer period of time would be effective in helping patients live longer and avoid return of the disease, without suffering from the harmful side effects associated with higher doses of interferon. Researchers in the United Kingdom enrolled 674 melanoma patients in a phase III clinical trial to determine whether patients given low doses of interferon following surgery lived longer compared to patients who received no follow-up treatment. After five years, they found no significant difference between the two groups in overall survival or the length of time before disease returned. According to their findings, 63% of patients in both groups saw their disease return, and 46% of patients in both groups died. However, as researchers expected, low-dose interferon was relatively well tolerated, with patients noting fatigue and mood disturbance as the primary side effects. **What Does This Mean For Patients?** This study provides important new information about existing treatment options for high-risk melanoma patients. Patients and their physicians should be armed with all of the facts about interferon use so that they can make informed decisions regarding treatment. While optimal care for patients with high-risk melanoma is not yet clear, continued participation in well-designed clinical trials like this one will ensure that the medical community makes continued progress in the treatment of melanoma. Patients who are interested in clinical trials should discuss their options with their doctor and participating centers.

Links:

[1] <http://www.jco.org/>

[2] <http://www.jco.org/cgi/content/abstract/JCO.2004.03.185v1>