Printed May 20, 2013 from http://www.cancer.net/publications-and-resources/cancer-advances/news-patients-asco-symposia/gastrointestinal-cancer-advances-news-2011-gastrointestinal-cancers-symposium/special-type-radiation-therapy-anal-cancer-causes-fewer-side-effects

Special Type of Radiation Therapy for Anal Cancer Causes Fewer Side Effects

Researchers found that using intensity-modulated radiation therapy or IMRT for anal cancer works as well as standard radiation therapy but has fewer severe side effects. Radiation therapy is the use of high-energy x-rays or other particles to kill cancer cells. IMRT is a type of radiation therapy that allows the strength of the radiation beams to be changed during treatment depending on the shape and location of the tumor. This means that the radiation can be directed at the tumor while avoiding healthy tissue.

This study included 52 patients with anal cancer who received IMRT and chemotherapy, specifically the drugs fluorouracil (5-FU, Adrucil) and mitomycin-C (Mitozytrex, Mutamycin). About two years after treatment, 86% of patients were alive and 77% no longer had anal cancer. Researchers compared these results to another study in which patients received standard radiation therapy and the same chemotherapy and found that the results were very similar, meaning that both types of radiation are equally effective. However, researchers found that patients who received IMRT had fewer gastrointestinal side effects and skin problems from treatment.

What this means for patients

?Radiation therapy combined with chemotherapy with 5-FU and mitomycin-C is the standard treatment for patients with anal cancer that has not spread,? said lead researcher Lisa Kachnic, MD, Chair of Radiation Oncology at Boston University. ?This treatment helps patients remain cancer-free for a long time, but is associated with severe side effects from the large areas affected by the radiation. Using IMRT instead of conventional radiation therapy may help reduce the severity of these side effects.? IMRT is widely available and used as a treatment for other types of cancer.

What to ask your doctor

- What type and stage of anal cancer do I have? What does this mean?
- What are my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- Do you recommend radiation therapy? If so, what type?
- How can the side effects of treatment be managed?

For More Information

Guide to Anal Cancer [1]

Understanding Radiation Therapy [2]

Side Effects of Radiation Therapy [3]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/node/18462
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24728
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24677