New Targeted Immunotherapy Is a Promising Treatment for Several Advanced Cancers

ASCO Annual Meeting
May 15, 2013

A new type of targeted immunotherapy (called MPDL3280A) was able to shrink several different types of cancer, including lung, melanoma, kidney, colorectal, and stomach cancers in patients whose cancer had worsened while receiving other treatments. Immunotherapy is designed to boost the body?s natural defenses to fight the cancer. It uses materials either made by the body or in a laboratory to improve, target, or restore immune system function. Specifically, this new treatment targets PD-L1, a protein on the surface of tumor cells that prevents the immune system from fighting the tumor. Basically, this treatment stops PD-L1 from working, which then allows the body?s immune system to fight the cancer.

This study included 140 patients with locally advanced cancer (cancer that has spread near where it started) or metastatic cancer (cancer that had spread to other parts of the body) that had worsened while receiving earlier treatments. Overall, 29 out of 140 (21%) patients had their tumors shrink, and the treatment has continued to work for three months to more than 15 months for 26 of these 29 patients. However, this was a small, early study, and larger studies will be needed to confirm that this immunotherapy works well.

What this means for patients

?We are impressed with how often and how long this drug worked for patients with very difficult-to-treat tumors. So far, almost none of the patients that have had tumor shrinkage have had their cancers worsen,? said Roy S. Herbst, MD, PhD, Ensign Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology at Yale Cancer Center and Chief of Medical Oncology at Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale-New Haven in Connecticut. This new treatment is still being researched, and a test to find PD-L1 on the surface of tumors is being developed and studied. It is currently only available through clinical trials. If you are interested in participating in a clinical trial, talk with your doctor for more information.

Dr. Herbst was a recipient of a Conquer Cancer Foundation of ASCO Young Investigator Award in 1997 and a Career Development Award in 1999.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type of cancer do I have and what is the stage? What does this mean?
- What are my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?

For More Information

Cancer.Net Guides to Cancer [1]

Understanding Immunotherapy [2]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24726