New Targeted Therapy for Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia Shows Promise

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In early, ongoing research, the drug, idelalisib helped to shrink tumors for patients with recurrent or treatment-resistant chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL). CLL is a slow-growing cancer and many patients do not need treatment until they start having symptoms. However, after treatment, most patients will have the disease come back, called recurrent or relapsed CLL. About 20% of patients will develop treatment-resistant or refractory CLL, meaning the disease comes back quickly or the original treatment did not work.

Idelalisib is a type of targeted therapy, a treatment that targets the cancer?s specific genes, proteins, or the tissue environment that contributes to cancer growth and survival. Specifically, idelalisib stops an overactive protein called PI3K-delta that helps CLL grow and spread.

In this study, 54 patients with refractory or relapsed CLL that had worsened on several earlier treatments received idelalisib for around nine months. About two-thirds of the patients receiving idelalisib had their tumors shrink, generally in the first two months after starting treatment. Researchers also found that the drug kept the disease from worsening for about 17 months, and many patients noticed fewer symptoms of the disease, such as fatigue.

What this means for patients

?We are reaching a point in CLL where we have multiple treatments in development that are very effective. Drugs like idelalisib are probably going to change the landscape of the disease in the next few years,? said lead study author Jennifer Brown, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Medicine at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts. ?While this research is still early and ongoing, we hope this drug, along with others like it, will lengthen patients? lives and eventually help turn CLL into a condition that is treated like high blood pressure, where a patient can take a couple of pills every day. In the shorter term, these drugs may also provide an alternative to chemotherapy for older patients who may not be able to handle chemotherapy.? Because idelalisib is still being researched, it is only available as part of a clinical trial. If you are interested in participating in a clinical trial, talk with your doctor for more information.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type of leukemia do I have?
- What treatments have I already received and what are my additional treatment options?
- What are the side effects of these treatments?
- What clinical trials are open to me?

For More Information

Guide to Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia [1]

Understanding Targeted Treatments [2]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/node/19092
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24729