Printed December 4, 2013 from http://www.cancer.net/cancer-news-and-meetings/asco-annual-meetings/research-summaries/selumetinib-first-effective-drug-advanced-melanoma-eye

Selumetinib Is the First Effective Drug for Advanced Melanoma of the Eye

Results from a new study show that the drug selumetinib keeps metastatic (cancer that has spread) melanoma of the eye from worsening and lengthens patients? lives. Melanoma of the eye (also called uveal melanoma) is a rare cancer. Most patients with uveal melanoma are diagnosed when the cancer is located in the eye. But, the cancer eventually spreads outside of the eye to other parts of the body in about half of patients, and these patients usually live about nine to 12 months after diagnosis, so a drug that can lengthen patients? lives is a major breakthrough.

The current standard treatment is the drug temozolomide (Temodar), but its benefit is limited and new treatments have been needed. Selumetinib 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. In particular, selumetinib targets mutated (changed) *Gnaq* and *Gna11* genes, which help the cancer grow. These gene mutations are found in 85% of patients with melanoma of the eye.

The 98 patients with metastatic melanoma of the eye participating in this study received either selumetinib or temozolomide (48 patients received selumetinib and 50 received temozolomide). During the study, patients who had their disease worsen while receiving temozolomide were able to switch to selumetinib. Researchers found that the tumors in 50% of patients shrank, with 15% of the patients who received selumetinib experiencing considerable tumor shrinkage, compared with none of the patients who received temozolomide.

In addition, it took almost four months for the disease to worsen for patients who took selumetinib, compared with almost two months for those who took temozolomide.

What this means for patients

?This study proves that inhibiting *Gnaq* and *Gna11* mutations is effective, more than doubling the length of time it takes for the disease to worsen,? said lead author Richard D. Carvajal, MD [1], a medical oncologist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. ?We?re hopeful a drug like selumetinib will be commercially available in the near future; in the meantime, we must continue to steer patients towards clinical trials.? If you are interested in participating in a clinical trial, talk with your doctor for more information.

Dr. Carvajal was a recipient of a Conquer Cancer Foundation of ASCO Young Investigator Award in 2008 and a Career Development Award in 2010, which partially funded this study.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type of eye cancer do I have?
- What is the stage? What does this mean?
- What is my prognosis (chance of recovery)?
- What are my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?

For More Information

Guide to Eye Cancer [2]

Understanding Targeted Treatments [3]

Clinical Trials [4]

Links:
[1] http://www.conquercancerfoundation.org/study-funded-conquer-cancer-foundation-identifies-new-therapy-rare-melanoma-eye
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/18811
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24729
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24863