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Topic #5: Do Not Use Therapy Targeted Against Spec. Gene Mutation When Patient?s Tumor Does Not Have Gene Mutation [1]

Background

As part of the cancer diagnosis process, your doctor may recommend running laboratory tests on a piece (or sample) of the tumor to identify specific genes, proteins, and other factors unique to the cancer. Results of these tests will help decide whether your treatment options include a type of drug treatment called targeted therapy. Targeted therapy targets the cancer?s specific genes, proteins, or the tissue environment that contributes to cancer growth and survival. This type of treatment blocks the growth and spread of cancer cells while limiting damage to normal cells.

Not all tumors have the same targets, and not all people with the same type of cancer have the same types of genetic mutations (changes) in their cancers. Because targeted therapy is directed at a specific genetic change in a tumor, it may not work as well, or may not work at all, if the tumor does not have that specific genetic change.

Recommendation

ASCO recommends that targeted therapy directed at a specific genetic change should not be used if a patient?s cancer does not have that genetic change.

What this means for patients

Before making the decision to receive a targeted therapy, talk with your doctor about why it is recommended, how likely it is to successfully treat the cancer, and how it compares to other treatment options. Because most targeted therapies are newer and more expensive to make, the cost is generally higher than other treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Also, like other cancer treatments, targeted therapies do cause side effects, which can be significant. For these reasons, it is important that you only receive targeted therapies that are directed at a specific genetic change(s) if that change is found in your cancer. This will help you get the most

benefit from your treatment, without experiencing unnecessary side effects or adding unnecessary costs.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What type and stage of cancer do I have?
- Was the tumor tested for specific genetic changes?
- What are my treatment options?
- Is targeted therapy recommended? Why or why not?
- What side effects can I expect from this targeted therapy?
- If I have concerns about managing the costs of my cancer care, who can help me with those concerns?

For More Information

Guides to Cancer [2]

Understanding Targeted Treatments [3]

Facts About Personalized Cancer Medicine [4]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us/collaborations/top-five-list-oncology/choosing-wisely%C2%AE-2013-asco%E2%80%99s-second-list-top-five-tests-procedures-and-treatments-many-patients-do/topic-5-do-not-use-therapy-targeted-against-spec-gene-mutation-when-patient%E2%80%99s-tumor-does-not-have
[2] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types
[3] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/cancernet-feature-articles/treatments-tests-and-procedures/understanding-targeted-treatments
[4] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/cancernet-feature-articles/cancer-basics/facts-about-personalized-cancer-medicine