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Oncologist-approved cancer information from the American Society of Clinical Oncology

Additional Chemotherapy with Docetaxel Lengthens Lives for Patients with Worsening Esophageal and Stomach Cancers [1]

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Recently, researchers confirmed that giving the drug docetaxel (Taxotere, Docefrez) as a second-line therapy lengthened the lives of patients with esophago-gastric cancers that worsened despite treatment. Second-line treatment is using treatments after the primary or first treatments (called first-line therapy) have ended or are no longer working. Esophago-gastric cancers include cancer of the esophagus, stomach, and the area where the esophagus and stomach join, called the esophago-gastric junction. These types of cancers are often difficult to treat and the disease worsens after first-line therapy for most patients, making the increase in survival seen in this study a major improvement.

This study included 168 patients with esophago-gastric cancer that had spread to areas near where it started or other parts of the body whose disease had worsened within six months of first-line chemotherapy. The patients received either docetaxel or treatment to manage the symptoms and side effects of the cancer (called supportive care), which is often the best option available. Overall, the patients who received docetaxel lived 50% longer than those receiving supportive care (around five months compared with a little more than three and a half months). Patients who received second-line therapy with docetaxel also experienced less pain than those receiving supportive care.

What this means for patients

?Current practice in the United States is to give second-line chemotherapy to patients with esophago-gastric cancers, even though the evidence isn?t as strong as we would like,? said lead author Hugo Ford, MD, Director of Cancer Services at Addenbrooke?s Hospital in Cambridge, United Kingdom. ?This is the first research study to show that second-line chemotherapy lengthens patients? lives without lowering their quality of life.? In addition to docetaxel, the drugs irinotecan (Camptosar) and paclitaxel (Taxol) may also be options for second-line therapy. It?s important to talk with your doctor about the risk of your cancer worsening and the treatment options available if it does worsen. Supportive care is also always an option to help relieve the symptoms and side effects.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type of cancer do I have, and what is the stage? What does this mean?
- Has the cancer worsened since I?ve been receiving treatment?
- What treatments have I already received?
- What additional treatment options do I have?
- How will my symptoms and side effects be managed?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- What is my chance of recovery?

For More Information

Guide to Esophageal Cancer [2]

Guide to Stomach Cancer [3]

When the First Treatment Doesn?t Work [4]

Making Decisions About Cancer Treatment [5]

Clinical Trials [6]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/additional-chemotherapy-docetaxel-lengthens-lives-patients-worsening-esophageal-and-stomach-cancers
[2] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/esophageal-cancer
[3] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/stomach-cancer
[4] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/cancernet-feature-articles/treatments-tests-and-procedures/when-first-treatment-doesnt-work
[5] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/cancernet-feature-articles/cancer-basics/making-decisions-about-cancer-treatment
[6] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/clinical-trials