

New combination therapy safe, promising for melanoma patients

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The combination of two different biotherapies may be beneficial for patients with inoperable melanoma, according to a University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (UPCI) study presented at the 44th annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in Chicago.

Researchers in the melanoma and skin cancer program at UPCI combined two biotherapies – treatments that stimulate the immune system to fight cancer – and found the results promising in terms of anti-tumor effects and tolerable in terms of toxicity. High-dose interferon alfa-2b, a standard treatment for metastatic skin cancer, and tremelimumab, an antibody thought to instigate the body's immune system to attack tumors, were combined for the first time in this phase 2 clinical trial.

“With each new study, we learn something important about melanoma,” said John M. Kirkwood, M.D., leader of the program and professor and vice chairman for clinical research in the Department of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. “With this study, we learned that adding tremelimumab to traditional treatment is not only safe, but an effective way to induce an anti-tumor response, which is very exciting.”

For this study, 16 patients diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma, all of whom received and had not benefited from at least one round of previous therapy, were given the combination treatment. The overall

response rate was 19 percent, and the study has since moved into the second stage, where it will enroll 21 additional patients.

Melanoma is a rare form of skin cancer, but it causes the majority of skin cancer-related deaths. Each year, approximately 160,000 new cases are diagnosed worldwide, and currently surgery is the only effective cure. For patients with inoperable disease, like those enrolled in this study, discovering a safe and effective treatment is vital.

Source: University of Pittsburgh

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