

Team studies obinutuzumab for treating chronic lymphocytic leukemia

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Two North Shore-LIJ Cancer Institute doctors, world-renowned for their research in chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), weigh in on a German study of a new drug therapy for CLL in the March 20 edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the North Shore-LIJ Health System announced today.

CLL is one of the most common forms of blood cancers, usually affecting those later in life. In an editorial written by Kanti Rai, MD, chief of CLL Research and Treatment Program for the health system, and Jacqueline Barrientos, MD, a research hematologist on staff at the CLL Program, they point out that an important factor in the study is that most of the nearly 800 subjects are elderly with coexisting other health issues.

Until now, researchers have skipped this population in favor of younger and healthier subjects, say the doctors, who also have academic appointments at Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine. However, the average age of CLL patients at diagnosis is 72, and most usually have other health problems.

The study focused on the use of obinutuzumab, an antibody that binds to the protein CD20, in subjects with previously untreated CLL and coexisting conditions. Most cases of CLL start in white blood cells that have CD20 on their surface.

Researchers compared the benefits of obinutuzumab with that of another

antibody rituximab, which also attacks CD20. Both drugs were combined with the chemotherapy drug chlorambucil. They found that subjects receiving obinutuzumab-chlorambucil had an average of 26.7 months progression-free of the disorder compared to 16.3 for those given rituximab-chlorambucil. To read more about the study, visit the *New England Journal of Medicine* online.

Findings of the study will have an important impact on future CLL research, explained Dr. Rai, who is also an investigator at North Shore-LIJ's Feinstein Institute for Medical Research. "The researchers' work will encourage future use of obinutuzumab in combination with other drugs and help shape the clinical landscape of CLL in the next decade."

Provided by North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System

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