

Immunotherapy combination shows benefit for patients with advanced melanoma

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A combination of two drugs that target different proteins on immune system T cells kept advanced melanoma in check significantly longer than one of the drugs alone in a phase 3 clinical trial involving 714 patients. Dana-Farber Cancer Institute investigators co-led the study. Findings will be presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting, being held virtually June 4-8, 2021, and are included in the ASCO press program.

The trial, known as the RELATIVITY-047 study, compared the effectiveness of the drug nivolumab, an [immune checkpoint inhibitor](#), by itself against a combination of the LAG-3 blocking antibody relatlimab and nivolumab given as a fixed-dose. Trial participants who received the [combination therapy](#) as their [initial treatment](#) had a median progression-free survival—the time in which the disease did not worsen—of 10.1 months, compared to 4.6 months for those treated with nivolumab alone, investigators found. Twelve months after treatment, 47.7% of patients treated with the two-drug regimen had no advance of their disease, compared to 36% of those who received only nivolumab. The side effects of the combination were generally manageable.

Both nivolumab and relatlimab are antibody drugs. They target separate proteins on T cells to revive and reinvigorate the cells' natural attack on tumor cells. Nivolumab targets PD-1, a checkpoint protein that prompts T cells to call off their attack when it binds to a corresponding protein on tumor cells. Relatlimab targets the protein LAG-3, an immune checkpoint receptor protein that functions to control T-cell response,

activation and growth.

"Immune checkpoint inhibitors such as [nivolumab](#) have revolutionized the treatment of patients with advanced melanoma," said F. Stephen Hodi, MD, the director of the Melanoma Center and the Center for Immuno-Oncology at Dana-Farber and the co-senior author of the study.

"However, novel combinations of checkpoint inhibitors with other immune agents are needed to improve results. The RELATIVITY trial is the first study of a combination treatment to demonstrate a clinically important benefit by simultaneously inhibiting the LAG-3 and PD-1 pathways."

Provided by Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

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