Targeted lymphoma drug gets green light for NHS in England

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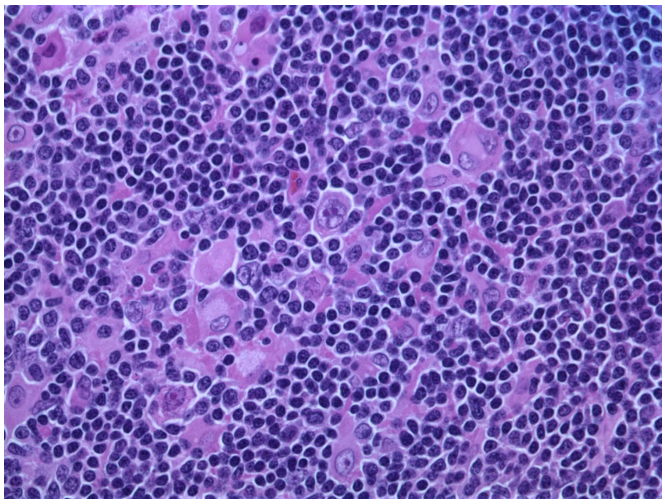

Hodgkin lymphoma, nodular lymphocyte predominant (high-power view) Credit: Gabriel Caponetti, MD./Wikipedia/CC BY-SA 3.0

People with a certain type of lymphoma will now have access to a targeted cancer drug on the NHS in England.

Brentuximab vedotin (Adcetris) was approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for some patients with a type of skin lymphoma, called CD30-positive cutaneous T-cell lymphomas (CTCL).

The drug will now be an option for patients whose lymphoma has come back or got worse after one round of treatment, after it was found to stop the disease getting worse. It can either be used prior to a stem cell transplant or on its own.

Rose Gray, Cancer Research UK's policy manager, called the decision "fantastic news."

"This drug has shown great benefits in clinical trials for patients with more aggressive disease. Compared to existing treatment options, more patients saw their cancer shrink after receiving the drug, and it also substantially delayed the spread of their cancer."

Targeting lymphoma cells

CTCL is a form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma that affects the skin. It typically develops as flat red patches on the skin's surface, which can then develop into tumours.

The newly approved treatment sticks to a molecule on the surface of some lymphoma cells and delivers a drug to kill the cell. It will be available for the two most common types of skin lymphoma, mycosis fungoides and Sezary syndrome.

Expanding treatment options

Standard treatment for NHS patients with this type of lymphoma is the chemotherapy drug methotrexate or another drug called bexarotene. But in a trial of 128 patients with CTCL, brentuximab vedotin was found to be more effective at shrinking tumours.

Thirty-six out of 64 patients taking the targeted drug saw their cancer respond to the treatment for at least 4 months, compared to 8 out of 64 taking one of the standard treatments. Patients who took brentuximab vedotin were alive without their cancer getting worse for an average of 16.5 months, compared to 3.5 months on average for those taking current treatments.

The group taking brentuximab vedotin also reported fewer severe side effects than those taking the current treatments. But brentuximab vedotin affected the nervous system in a large proportion of patients, with 44 out of 64 patients experiencing a tingling or pain sensation in the finger tips or toes, called peripheral neuropathy.

NICE had initially rejected the targeted treatment because it couldn't calculate how much the treatment would cost. But the company has since submitted further evidence, which helped NICE clarify how much the drug is likely to cost the NHS.

"Patients and clinicians told NICE there is a real need for new treatment options in this specific type of blood cancer, so it's great that NHS England, NICE and the company have worked together to reach this deal," said Gray.

More information: Brentuximab vedotin for treating CD30-positive cutaneous T-cell lymphoma [ID1190]. www.nice.org.uk/guidance/indev … id-ta10201/documents

Provided by Cancer Research UK