Critical Lessons From High-Value Oncology Practices

Blayney et al asked, “What attributes of oncology practices deliver high-quality cancer care at low total cost?” They visited 7 US oncology practices with structured interview questionnaires. Five attributes distinguished high-value practices: conservative use of imaging, early discussion of treatment limitations and consequences, single point of contact, maximal use of registered nurses for interventions, and a multicomponent health care system. Three attributes, early and normalized palliative care, ambulatory rapid response, and early discussion of treatment limitations and consequences, carry high potential for lowering spending without compromising care. Sox et al provide an Invited Commentary.

Endocrine Dysfunction After Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors

Immune-mediated endocrine dysfunction can be a life-threatening toxic effect associated with immune checkpoint inhibitor use. Barroso-Sousa et al performed a meta-analysis of 38 randomized clinical trials of immune checkpoint inhibitors, comprising 7551 patients, to estimate the incidence and risk of this adverse event. The risk of hyperthyroidism, but not hypothyroidism, was greater with programmed death protein 1 (PD-1) than with programmed death ligand 1 inhibitors. Patients using PD-1 inhibitors had less hypophysitis than those using ipilimumab. Combination therapies were associated with a higher incidence of endocrine dysfunction than single agents. These risks can be communicated to patients.

Paclitaxel and Pazopanib for Recurrent Ovarian Cancer

Newer multitarget tyrosine kinase inhibitors of vascular endothelial growth factor, such as pazopanib, may be more potent than antiangiogenic agents for ovarian cancer treatment. Richardson et al conducted a phase 2 randomized clinical trial of the effects of pazopanib 800 mg orally daily in combination with paclitaxel vs paclitaxel and placebo on survival in 106 women with recurrent ovarian cancer. All patients received paclitaxel 80 mg/m² intravenously on days 1, 8, and 15 every 28 days. Median progression-free survival was longer but overall survival was shorter for pazopanib plus paclitaxel vs paclitaxel alone. Pazopanib plus paclitaxel was not superior to paclitaxel alone. Pazopanib, may be more potent than antiangiogenic agents for ovarian cancer treatment. Richardson et al conducted a phase 2 randomized clinical trial of the effects of pazopanib 800 mg orally daily in combination with paclitaxel vs paclitaxel and placebo on survival in 106 women with recurrent ovarian cancer. All patients received paclitaxel 80 mg/m² intravenously on days 1, 8, and 15 every 28 days. Median progression-free survival was longer but overall survival was shorter for pazopanib plus paclitaxel vs paclitaxel alone. Pazopanib plus paclitaxel was not superior to paclitaxel alone. Pazopanib, may be more potent than antiangiogenic agents for ovarian cancer treatment.

ALK Rearrangements in Malignant Peritoneal Mesothelioma

Malignant peritoneal mesothelioma is a rare disease, but highly lethal. Finding an actionable mutation could improve clinical outcomes. Hung et al evaluated tumors from 88 patients with the condition. Anaplastic lymphoma kinase was positive by immunohistochemistry in 11 (13%) peritoneal mesotheliomas. Patients with ALK-rearranged tumors were women and younger than patients without ALK rearrangement. These data suggest that such patients should be tested for ALK, and provide the potential for ALK-directed therapy.

Biosimilars in Oncology in the United States

The availability of biosimilars might provide an opportunity to lower health care expenditures because of the inherent price competition with their reference product. Understanding how biosimilar cancer drugs are regulated, approved, and paid for, as well as their impact in a value-based care environment, is essential for physicians and other stakeholders in oncology. This review provides an overview of the differences between biosimilar and generic drugs. These differences may limit the presumed positive financial impact that biosimilars may have on health care costs when these types of drugs enter the market.

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