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Fulvestrant

A Viewpoint by Robert W. Carlson

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Fulvestrant is a member of the new class of hormonal therapies for breast cancer that result in the down-regulation of the estrogen receptor. In both preclinical and clinical studies, fulvestrant appears non-cross resistant with the selective estrogen receptor modulator tamoxifen. The results of 2 large phase III trials document fulvestrant to be at least as active as the aromatase inhibitor anastrozole in postmenopausal women previously treated with hormonal therapy (primarily tamoxifen).

Fulvestrant requires monthly intramuscular injection that allows for the accurate monitoring of compliance, but at the same time introduces the toxicity of injection site reactions (8 and 27% in the European and North American trials, respectively). Overall, fulvestrant was well tolerated in the phase III trials with withdrawal rates (3.2 and 2.5%) comparable to anastrozole (2.2 and 2.6%). The available data are limited to second-line therapy of postmenopausal women with metastatic breast cancer (hormone receptor-positive or status unknown).

Further study is required of fulvestrant in the treatment of premenopausal breast cancer and in the adjuvant treatment of postmenopausal breast cancer. The definitive placement of fulvestrant in the sequence of hormonal therapies such as the aromatase inhibitors (anastrozole, letrozole), aromatase inactivators (exemestane), and tamoxifen in postmenopausal women with hormone receptor-positive, metastatic breast cancer remains to be determined. ▲