



Prof. Heinz Zwierzina

"You can foresee after a short period of erythropoietin treatment whether the patient is going to respond to treatment or not."

Erythropoietin has received a positive opinion from the EMEA (European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products) for the treatment of anaemia associated with malignancy, specifically the prevention and treatment of anaemia induced by platin-containing chemotherapy. It is currently on the market in Austria for the treatment of anaemia related to malignant disease. It is not paid for by health insurance in certain European countries (such as Germany or Switzerland among others) for this indication.

The guidelines are expected to be published soon, probably in the *European Journal of Cancer*. Professor Heinz Zwierzina briefly described them. "If you see that the endogenous serum levels of erythropoietin is high and after 2 weeks of treatment the haemoglobin doesn't increase, then the predictive power of non-response is almost 100%, so you shouldn't treat these patients long. If it is not the case, then go on with erythropoietin treatment and if after 2 weeks time the erythropoietin in the serum is still low and the haemoglobin has increased, then you know that 95% of these patients will respond."

However, longer follow-up time of more patients in prospective clinical trials is needed to settle this question, and establish a reliable cost-benefit ratio.

Topotecan for Relapsing Ovarian Cancer Now Licensed in Europe

Topotecan has been licensed by the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMA) for use in the 15 European Union member states for the treatment of patients with metastatic cancer of the ovary after failure of first-line or subsequent therapy.

The authorisation was granted in November, and the U.K. is expected to be the first European country in which the drug will be marketed. This will take place early this year.

In May 1996, topotecan received clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of patients with metastatic ovarian cancer after failure of initial or subsequent chemotherapy. The agent has also received marketing approval in Switzerland, Brazil and Venezuela.

Topotecan (Hycamtin®) kills cancer cells by inhibiting the enzyme topoisomerase I which is essential in the replication of DNA in human cells. The EORTC has played a large role in the development of the agent, as commented in International Cancer News in the report of the U.S. launch.

Ovarian cancer is the fastest spreading and most lethal of women's malignancies. It is without symptoms in its early stages and screening methods are inadequate, 75% of all women are not diagnosed until the tumour has spread beyond the ovaries. Women who relapse within 6 months of primary therapy are unlikely to respond a second time. For these cases, and those who do not respond to primary therapy at all, second-line therapy is the only option.

From The Countries

SWITZERLAND

German-speaking Section of ESO Completes Successful First Year

A new German-speaking section of the European School of Oncology has almost completed its first year of operation (ESO-D). The new section has been developed on similar lines to the "Expression Francaise" and the "Ambito Espanol".

ESO-D promotes the longstanding aims and goals of ESO among health-care professionals (oncologists, primary physicians, nurses, etc) and co-ordinates multidisciplinary teaching activities in oncology in the German-speaking parts of Europe in close co-operation with ESO-Milano and ESO-Vienna.

ESO-D's co-ordinating centre at the Kantonsspital, St Gallen, Switzerland, has for many years been known for its educational activities and interdisciplinary cancer conferences. It is near Lake

Constance (Bodensee), the historic "meeting-point" of German-speaking countries in Europe.

In 1996, its first year of operation, ESO-D organised four courses with more than 400 participants. For 1997, the Scientific Committee has planned 10 courses in Germany, Switzerland and Austria (eight for oncologists, two for nurses or for both groups) in various interesting or controversial fields of oncology, ranging from combined curative radiochemotherapy to palliative cancer care.

ESO-D is supported by D-SONK, the "Deutschsprachig-Europäische Stiftung für Onkologische Kurse" in St Gallen, a private, government-independent, non-profit foundation, and by ESO-Foundation itself.