

This issue's topics



Synergistic activity of Yondelis (ET-743, trabectedin) and cisplatin *in vivo*

Yondelis and cisplatin show synergistic activity *in vivo* with no overlapping toxicities, D'Incalci and colleagues report in this issue. Their rationale behind testing the combination of these two drugs lay in the fact that they have different mechanisms of action with DNA and activate different DNA repair mechanisms. Moreover, the contrasting sensitivities of cell lines with differing repair capabilities to these drugs suggested that they might be advantageously combined, thereby targeting different cell populations within the same tumour. In their study, the two drugs—given in combination—were even active in tumours where single-agent treatment had produced little activity. The authors propose that the combination should therefore be tested, not only in tumours in which the two drugs given alone are effective, but also in those tumours considered resistant to the single agents. “It seems attractive to test the combination of the two drugs in patients who are relapsing or refractory to first-line chemotherapy,” they conclude. In an accompanying editorial, Professor John Smyth suggests that it would be of interest to see these experiments extended to more widely-used platinum drugs such as carboplatin.

The treating institution impacts upon the survival of head and neck patients

Patients with advanced squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck treated at the co-ordinating centre with an alternating chemotherapy and radiation regimen had a better survival than those treated at other centres. This is the conclusion of a study in this issue by Benasso and colleagues using data obtained from two multicentre trials. 293 patients were studied (166 treated at the co-ordinating centre), who were given either radiation alone or a combination of alternating chemotherapy and radiation. 3-year overall survival rates were 46% for the patients at the co-ordinating centre compared with 27% at the other centres—a significant difference. There was a more cautious approach in the affiliated centres with regard to the delivery of the combined therapy, despite similar levels of toxicity being observed in both the affiliated and co-ordinating centres. However, no difference in survival was observed between the centres for those treated with radiation alone (23% versus 21%, respectively). “This finding has implications, both in terms of clinical research and clinical practice,” the authors conclude.

Defining ulceration in melanomas

Ulceration in melanomas is considered a major and independent prognostic factor. However, deciding what constitutes ulceration can be difficult to determine, even in experienced hands. In this issue, Spatz and colleagues have defined ulceration as “full-thickness epidermal defect (including absence of *stratum corneum* and basement membrane), evidence of host response (i.e. fibrin deposition, neutrophils) and thinning, effacement or reactive hyperplasia of the surrounding epidermis”. They asked six pathologists to examine 100 slides “according to their own experience and interpretation of the literature” (first set) and then examine 100 additional slides—as well as those in the first set which were randomly mixed with the second set—using their definition above. The authors found—using kappa statistics—a superior interobserver reproducibility among the pathologists for the second set of slides. The authors propose that their definition could be incorporated into a standardised pathology worksheet for reporting primary melanomas.

Forthcoming papers

Editorial Comments

Geographical differences in cancer incidence

L. Jarup, N. Best

OncoloGIST, BioloGIST, RadioloGIST: the big impact on the field of oncology of a molecularly-targeted therapy designed to treat a rare disease
G.D. Demetri

Reviews

Use and abuse of taxanes in the management of metastatic breast cancer

C. Bernard-Marty, F. Cardoso, M.J. Piccart, *et al.*

Diagnostic and therapeutic management of cancer of unknown primary

N. Pavlidis, E. Briasoulis, J. Hainsworth, F.A. Greco

Original Papers

Clinical

Imatinib (STI-571): an active agent for gastrointestinal stromal tumours, but not yet yielding responses in other soft-tissue sarcomas that are unselected for a molecular target

J. Verweij, A. van Oosterom, J.-Y. Blay, *et al.*

¹⁸FDG-Positron emission tomography for early prediction of response in advanced soft-tissue sarcoma treated with imatinib (Glivec)

S. Stroobants, J. Goeminne, M. Seegers, *et al.*

Evaluation of core needle biopsy as a substitute to open biopsy in the diagnosis of soft-tissue masses (STM)

I. Ray-Coquard, D. Ranchere-Vince, P. Thiesse, *et al.*

Darbepoetin alfa administered every 3 weeks alleviates anaemia in patients with solid tumours receiving chemotherapy: results of a double-blind, placebo-controlled randomised study

D. Kotasek, G. Steger, W. Fought, *et al.*

Quality assurance of EORTC trial 22922/10925 investigating the role of internal mammary–medial supraclavicular irradiation in stage I-III breast cancer: the individual case review

P. Poortmans, V.E. Kouloulis, J.L. Venselaar, *et al.*

Cyclooxygenase-1 and -2 in human testicular tumour

T. Hase, R. Yoshimura, M. Miatsuyama, *et al.*

Paediatric

Osteosarcoma recurrences in adolescents and adults previously treated with chemotherapy

F. Duffaud, L. Digue, C. Mercier, *et al.*

Nasopharyngeal carcinoma in childhood and adolescence

J. Daoud, N. Toumi, Ghorbel, *et al.*

Epidemiology and Cancer Prevention

Geographical differences in cancer incidence in the Belgian province of Limburg

F. Buntinx, H. Geys, D. Lousbergh, *et al.*

Determinants of care and improved survival of patients with rectal cancer since 1980: a population-based study

H. Martijn, A.C. Voogd, L.V. van de Poll-Franse, *et al.*

Epidemiology of gallbladder cancer and trends in cholecystectomy rates in Scotland, 1968–1998

R. Wood, L.A. Fraser, D.H. Brewster, O.J. Garden

Do increases in mortality from intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma reflect a genuine increase in risk? Insights from cancer registry data in Scotland

R. Wood, D.H. Brewster, L.A. Fraser, *et al.*

Experimental

STAT-3 activity in chemically-induced hepatocellular carcinoma

A. Sanchez, P. Nagy, S.S. Thorgeirsson

Receptor activator of nuclear factor kappaB (RANK) is expressed as a late event during malignant progression in Barrett's metaplasia

R. Yorke, A. Younes, M. Chirala, M. Younes

Recombinant IFN- α 2b treatment activates poly (ADPR) polymerase-1 (PARP-1) in KB cancer cells

P. Quesada, M. Malanga, S. Di Meglio, *et al.*

Letters

Letter to the Editor

R. Gray

Letter on SAKK

R. Maibach