



How Are MPN Patients Monitored?

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Andrew Schorr:

So people wonder, Dr. Verstovsek, monitoring over time. Some clinics say, well, maybe we need to do this test, ultrasound, MRI, CT, whatever. What do you typically do to monitor somebody?

Dr. Verstovsek:

This is very good question, and it has to do also with the particular case, a lot, but let's put it in general perspective. We always advise all of this testing that I have talked about. It's really not that complicated. It's blood and physical exam, it's bone marrow to be done in everybody at the baseline, meaning at the beginning when we want to know about the disease and the disease characteristics.

Then you follow patients prospectively, meaning see patients at certain time periods. You look at their spleen. You look at their symptoms. You look at their blood cell count, chemistry. Those are easy to get—no special testing needed other than blood taking and physical exam, talking to the patients. If the patient is stable, really there is no mandatory checking of the bone marrow because, I mean, the disease, unfortunately, is not going get better or go away.

We worry more about a change in this long-term follow-up of the blood count and physical exam. If there is significant change, then we do a bone marrow and see whether the bone marrow change is what is causing a drop in the red blood cell count and worsening anemia, or is the bone marrow becoming more fibrotic, so we need to do something about it, or there is a change in baby cells called blasts, or the patient, god forbid, is changing to acute leukemia over time. So bone marrows are done in everyday practice usually when there is a need to explain the change in the simple test of blood and physical exam symptoms.

The role of the ultrasound or CAT scan or MRI or others is on the side, I would say. It's not mandatory for one to have an ultrasound to see about the spleen size every year or so or even at the beginning. Those enlargements that are palpable, that you can feel, are usually clinically irrelevant, and you can easily measure with a tape, for example, the spleen or the liver. Now, they are useful to have over time, but they are not mandatory.

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