

Is My CLL Treatment Working?

Recorded on: February 1, 2014

Januario Castro, MD

Associate Professor of Medicine, Division of Bone Marrow and Stem Cell Transplant
UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center

Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of MD Anderson Cancer Center, its medical staff or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.

Andrew Schorr:

Dr. Castro, let me just ask you this. So we talked earlier today about the tools you have to have in personalized treatment. We talked about the genetics and so factoring all that in, now it's time for treatment, which you talked about some of the factors that would lead to that.

So how do we know whether it's working? So is it just the number? Or how do you know whether it's, whether the treatment you've chosen with your patient is correct?

Dr. Castro:

Yeah, so we look at the blood counts. We make sure that the white blood cell count is responding. It's probably one of the easiest, more objective numbers that we follow. I typically tell my patients that with the most treatments you should expect to have a worsening initially in the red cells and the platelets, but eventually they're going to get better.

Symptoms in general, most of you with CLL had probably experienced that, gradually you start losing that, kind of, stamina, that, kind of, energy. And over the years, you don't realize how much you're losing until you initiate treatment.

And then the next day you said, wow, definitely I was tired, definitely I was fatigued, and I never realized how much impact that was having in my lifestyle and my general performance. And ultimately we do bone marrow biopsies because that's how we want to assess how deep the response was.

And this is the area where we would like to assess, where we were talking about minimal residual disease, we want to know if the treatment was so effective that using any high resolution techniques, flow cytometry and others.

If we cannot detect leukemia cells, that would be the best possible outcome, complete remission, complete response with no evidence of minimal residual disease.

Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of MD Anderson Cancer Center, its medical staff or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.