



Patient Power

Real-World Response to CLL Combination Therapies

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Andrew Schorr:

You've been working on a lot of different combinations as well, and so one where there's data that's recently come out using a novel therapy, venetoclax (Venclexta) with rituximab (Rituxan) together, and my understanding is that it seems like it has some benefit.

Dr. Kipps:

Yeah, it certainly does. And it seems like we're getting higher rates of complete remissions and complete remissions also with the inability to detect minimal residual disease, which means that we can take sensitive means to try and look for leukemia cells in the blood or the marrow. The marrow is perhaps the more sensitive of the two sites—and if we don't find disease there it doesn't mean we've gotten rid of everything, but it certainly is a step in the right direction. I think that if we are able to clear out any disease that we can detect easily, then that's really sometimes the best category to be in, because that's certainly associated with a lot of time before you require additional therapy.

So, yes, we have been able to observe higher rates of remission and higher rates in which the patients have no detectable minimal residual disease after therapy. And recently we completed a study, the Marama study, which compared a popular regimen, bendamustine/rituximab with venetoclax and rituximab for patients who have relapsed CLL. And the upshot there was that the venetoclax/rituximab-treated patients had a more robust response, they had a deeper response, and they appear to be having a longer progression-free survival before requiring additional therapy. And it seems like the survival periods are favoring venetoclax and rituximab, too.

So here we have an oral regimen, venetoclax, compared to an IV regimen, such as bendamustine (Treanda), on being your standard type chemotherapy, and it may, I think in my opinion, eliminate or replace bendamustine/rituximab as a go-to regimen. And I think it's going to be a very important study in terms of governing how we manage our patients in the future.

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