

So far, 168 patients with non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) or prostate cancer have been treated with L-BLP25 vaccine in phase I or II clinical trials. A randomized phase IIb study was performed that compared the safety and efficacy of L-BLP25 in patients with stage IIIB or IV NSCLC against best supportive care (BSC). Data from this study revealed an overall median survival of 17.4 months for patients on the vaccine arm versus 13 months for the patients in the BSC arm. Two-year survival was 43% for the L-BLP25 vaccine arm versus 29% for the BSC arm. The median survival for patients with locoregional Stage IIIB disease (without pleural effusion) was 30.6 months in the L-BLP25 arm and 13.3 months for patients in the control arm. Two-year survival was 60% for the L-BLP25 vaccine arm versus 37% for the BSC arm. Safety data from the phase IIb study showed an incidence of adverse events similar to those previously reported in L-BLP25 clinical trials, i.e. mild to moderate flu-like symptoms and injection site reactions. Although the differences in survival were statistically not significant, these results suggest a survival advantage in locoregional stage IIIB patients treated with L-BLP25 vaccine. A phase III trial in unresectable stage III NSCLC patients will be launched in 2006.

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S27. SURVIVING – PRECLINICAL RATIONAL AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Jürgen C. Becker, Mads Hald Andersen. *Department of Dermatology, University of Wuerzburg, Germany; Department of Tumor Biology, Danish Cancer Society, Copenhagen, Denmark.*

Prognosis of most disseminated solid tumors remains gloomy as neither chemotherapeutic nor unspecific immune modulatory approaches were able to improve the overall survival of these patients. Hence, specific immunotherapy has received increasing attention. Disappointing clinical results, however, indicate that the choice of suitable antigens is of special importance. To this end, the inhibitor of apoptosis protein survivin, which is over-expressed in several tumours but is largely undetectable in adult tissues, appears to be a promising target for vaccination purposes, since downregulation or loss of expression is associated with impaired tumour progression. Consequently, heavily pretreated patients suffering from advanced, therapy-refractory melanoma, pancreatic, cervical or colorectal cancer were vaccinated with affinity-improved HLA-A1, A2 or B35-restricted survivin-derived peptide epitope together with Monatamide ISA-51 in a compassionate use setting. Preliminary results from an interim analysis of this ongoing clinical trial demonstrated that patients mounted strong survivin specific T cell responses as measured by ELISPOT assay and tetramer-staining. Furthermore, in situ peptide/HLA-A2 multimer staining confirmed that these survivin reactive cells infiltrated both visceral and soft tissue metastases. Most importantly, clinical activity was suggested by both disease stabilisation as well as objective responses.

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S28. THE ROLE OF EGFR FAMILY IN PRENEOPLASIA AND LUNG CANCER; PERSPECTIVES FOR TARGETED THERAPIES AND SELECTION OF PATIENTS

Fred R. Hirsch. *University of Colorado Cancer Center, United States.*

The Erb-B family of receptors seems to play an important role in the lung carcinogenesis. Several studies have demonstrated over expression of epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) in bronchial dysplasias.¹ We have studied 268 bronchial biopsies from high-risk individuals participating in a high-risk sputum cohort (>30 pack-years of smoking history and COPD defined as FEV1 < 70% of expected), and EGFR protein was strongly expressed in about 60% of patients with normal bronchial histologies, but increased with increased level of dysplasia. Also HER2 was highly expressed in both normal bronchial epithelium as well as in preneoplasias.²

The expression of EGFR/HER2 in malignant lung tumors was studied in several studies. Squamous cell carcinomas has most often high expression of EGFR, but less HER2, while adenocarcinomas has more often high expression of HER2 and less EGFR. Of interest is that bronchioloalveolar carcinomas has high expression of both EGFR and HER2, which can contribute to explain why this subtype seems to be more sensitive to EGFR inhibitors than the other non-small cell subtypes.³

The prognostic role of EGFR and HER2 has been addressed.^{4,5} In our study 183 patients with resected NSCLC were studied, and no significant prognostic association was demonstrated in this study. However, other studies have reported that EGFR overexpression is associated with poorer prognosis.⁵ In the UCCC study also the EGFR gene copy number was studied by FISH, and a tendency to a shorter survival was seen for increased gene copy number.⁴

The predictive role of EGFR and HER2 for sensitivity to EGFR TKIs has been studied at UCCC in two separate cohorts of NSCLC patients. In an Italian cohort of 108 NSCLC patients we found that EGFR protein expression, increased gene copy number detected by FISH and EGFR gene mutations were all associated to treatment outcome after EGFR TKI therapy.⁶ Patients with high EGFR gene copy number (high polysomy/amplification) had a high objective response rate (36%), disease control rate (67%) and median survival of 19 months, which was significantly better than the patients with no or low gene gain. The same was found in another study cohort (SWOG 0126) for patients with BAC subtypes.⁷ The association between increased EGFR gene copy number and survival has been demonstrated in two randomized placebo controlled studies, one with erlotinib with hazard ratio (HR) = 0.44 in the FISH positive group and in the ISEL study with gefitinib (HR = 0.61), while no differences was seen in the FISH negative groups.^{8,9}

In order to identify a panel of markers, which can predict sensitivity to EGFR TKIs we studied the predictive value of combined markers. While a combination of positive IHC and positive FISH were associated with very high response rates (41%) and prolonged survival (median 21 months), negative IHC and FISH assessment was associated with no response and very short survival (median 6months) indicating no clinical benefit in this group of patients.¹⁰ We have also performed in vitro NSCLC cell line studies with EGFR TKIs and characterized sensitive and resistant cell lines by Affymetrix gene chips. We have identified several