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PRODUCT UPDATE

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PHARMACY CORNER

Drug Is Found to Prevent Prostate Cancer

Finasteride (Proscar®, Merck & Co., Inc., Whitehouse Station, NJ) has been found to reduce the chance of developing prostate cancer in men taking the drug by nearly 25%, compared to men taking a placebo. The drug works equally well for men at high risk for developing prostate cancer as for men at low risk. However, men in the study taking finasteride who did develop prostate cancer were more likely to have an aggressive form of the disease. Men in the study taking finasteride also were more likely to have early-stage disease, which is curable more often.

Finasteride was approved in 1992 to treat benign prostatic hypertrophy and later was approved at a lower dose for prevention of male pattern baldness. Adverse side effects of finasteride include changes in sexual function. A full report on this research can be found at www.nejm.org. More information about finasteride can be found at www.proscar.com.

Palifermin Is Found to Reduce the Incidence of Mucositis

Palifermin, a recombinant human keratinocyte growth factor molecule, has been found to reduce the incidence and duration of mucositis. Naturally occurring keratinocyte growth factor stimulates the growth and development of epithelial cells, including the epithelial cells in mucosa. In a phase III study comparing palifermin to placebo in patients with hematologic malignancies treated with combination chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and stem-cell rescue, palifermin significantly reduced the occurrence of grade IV mucositis. The duration of severe mucositis was reduced by more than six days. Patients receiving palifermin also reported less oral pain and needed fewer pain medications.

Adverse side effects of palifermin include mild to moderate skin and oral erythema as well as transient increases in serum amylase and lipase levels. Otherwise, the drug was well tolerated. Patients at greatest risk for mucositis are those being treated for head and neck cancer and patients with hematologic malignancies who receive high-dose chemotherapy and radiation therapy followed by bone marrow transplant. Currently, no approved treatment or prevention for mucositis exists. For more information, visit www.amgen.com.

Oregovamab Extends Survival for Patients With Ovarian Cancer

Oregovamab (OvaRex®, United Therapeutics Corporation, Silver Springs, MD), an immunotherapeutic monoclonal antibody, has been found to extend time to relapse following front-line surgery and chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. The strongest clinical benefit was found in women who had optimal surgical cytoreduction, a favorable CA-125 response to chemotherapy, and no evidence of disease after chemotherapy. Patients with less optimal surgical cytoreduction and chemotherapy response did not benefit from oregovamab.

Currently, no approved treatment exists for women with ovarian cancer who are clinically disease free following initial treatment. However, the relapse rate is approximately 85%, and the five-year survival rate for advanced disease is only about 31%. The side-effect profile of oregovamab was similar to the placebo group. More information can be found at www.unither.com.

Polyglutamate Paclitaxel Given Fast-Track Status

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has designated Xyotax™ (polyglutamate paclitaxel, Cell Therapeutics, Inc., Seattle, WA) for fast-track development and review for the treatment of advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) in patients with poor performance status. Current treatment for patients with NSCLC and poor performance status provides only modest benefit. Xyotax is a new drug that combines paclitaxel with a biodegradable polyglutamate polymer. The polymer is designed to deliver higher levels of chemotherapy directly to the tumor and reduces the level of chemotherapy delivered to normal tissues. The goal is for Xyotax to be more effective and have fewer side effects than paclitaxel. Xyotax is in phase II and III studies. For more information, visit www.cticseattle.com.

NEW PRODUCTS

Aviana Introduces Support Pillow for Patients With Breast Cancer

Aviana Body Products and Body Work has introduced a support pillow for women to use after breast surgery. The pillow is designed to support a patient's arm in a natural position, reducing stress and pulling on surgical stitches. The pillow is available in two sizes and has an adjustable armband. The pillow was designed to provide support but still allow free range of motion and not block lymph flow. For more information, visit www.avianabody.com or call 717-533-5991.

Online Program Helps Patients Make Treatment Decisions

The NexCura® NexProfiler™ Tool for Cancer is a free, online program that provides personalized treatment information to patients with cancer. Using patient data, including diagnosis and test results, the program finds peer-reviewed clinical research studies and generates relevant treatment options, descriptions of side effects, expected treatment outcomes, and questions to discuss with their physicians. Patients also can access summaries of published peer-reviewed studies relevant to their diagnoses. The NexProfiler Tool for Cancer has 20 types of cancer in its database. The NexProfiler Tool for Cancer is available on the American Cancer Society's Web site. To access it, visit www.cancer.org and click on "Treatment Decision Tools" under the heading "Patients, Families, and Friends."

New Safety-Engineered Blood Collection Device Now Is Available

BD Clinical Laboratory Solutions in Franklin Lakes, NJ, has announced the availability of a new product, the BD Vacutainer® Push Button Blood Collection Set. This blood collection set features an innovative design that causes the needle to retract automatically into the device when a button is pushed. BD sought feedback from healthcare workers in designing this product. The result is a safety needle that is easy to use and intuitive. The Push Button Blood Collection Set has received U.S. Food and Drug Administration clearance for blood collection and for short-term infusions. For more information on this and related products, visit www.bd.com.

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