

Experimental drug shows promise in advanced kidney cancer

Barcelona, Spain: A new drug has shown promise in patients with advanced kidney cancer whose options run out after their tumour fails to respond to the cutting edge therapy.

The study, presented today (Wednesday) at the European Cancer Conference (ECCO 14) in Barcelona, showed that the experimental drug, axitinib, shrank tumours and delayed progression of the disease in a group of patients who are among the toughest to treat.

In the study, scientists gave axitinib to 62 patients whose kidney cancer had spread and who had not benefited from a standard treatment, sorafenib, a targeted therapy designed to disrupt cell division signals in cancer cells and block the tumour's ability to form new blood vessels that help it grow. Fourteen of the patients also had been given – to no avail – another similarly targeted drug, sunitinib, after the sorafenib had failed to work. Axitinib works similarly to the other two but is believed to be more potent.

“More than half the patients – 51 percent – experienced tumour shrinkage and in 23 percent of them the shrinkage is considered significant,” said lead investigator Dr Brian I. Rini, an associate professor of medicine at the Cleveland Clinic Taussig Cancer Institute in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and a paid member of the Pfizer scientific advisory board. “Preliminary analysis shows the progression-free survival was on average more than 7.7 months. We think these results are impressive because these patients were heavily pre-treated and with drugs thought to be similar to axitinib.

“The disease progressed in only 24 percent of patients, which we think is low in this kind of setting,” Rini added. The study found the tumour remained stable in 37 percent of the patients.

“Historically, metastatic kidney cancer has been very tough to treat, with a median survival of 12 months. Through the results of this trial, it appears that axitinib is a very active drug in renal cell cancer that can benefit a large number of patients,” Rini added.

The drug's maker, Pfizer, paid for the study. Axitinib is also being tested in advanced pancreatic, thyroid, lung and breast cancers.

Source: ECCO-the European CanCer Conference

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