

NEW CHEMOTHERAPY ‘CURES’ EARLY TESTICULAR CANCER

A single injection of carboplatin - a chemotherapy drug commonly used to treat ovarian and lung cancer - can replace radiotherapy to cure a common type of testicular cancer, according to results presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Birmingham today (Monday).

In the largest ever trial for this disease, funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC), a single carboplatin injection was used to treat 573 patients with early stage seminoma and compared with 2-3 weeks of daily radiotherapy, the current standard treatment, given to 904 patients. Patients given carboplatin experienced fewer side effects and were able to return to their normal lives earlier.

Of 573 patients given carboplatin, just 5 per cent relapsed - virtually all within three years - and after further successful treatment, none had died from their testicular cancer.

Patients are usually first treated with surgery to remove the testis where the disease was detected. The cancer can develop in the other testis in one in 20 patients. Patients treated with carboplatin showed a marked reduction in the incidence of cancer in the other testis - just two out of 573 experienced this compared with 15 of 904 patients treated with radiotherapy.

Experts are hailing this treatment as a ‘safer cure’ for seminoma - the most common form of germ cell cancer*.

Dr Ben Mead, honorary senior lecturer in medical oncology at the University of Southampton’s School of Medicine, who presented the study, said: “We were pleased by the results of this huge trial. Giving patients a carboplatin injection rather than radiotherapy is less unpleasant with fewer long-term risks.

“The initial results of the trial looked encouraging, but we needed to follow patients for another four years before we knew for sure that they had been cured. These follow up results are very reassuring and have already changed practice in Europe. We hope that carboplatin injections will become the standard treatment for this disease across the rest of the world within a few years. A particular advantage with this treatment is that follow up beyond three years is not necessary.”

Testicular cancers are usually either seminomas or non-seminomas. Around 40 to 45 per cent of testicular cancers are early stage seminomas - so between 780 and 880 men are diagnosed with the disease each year in the UK.

Professor Peter Johnson, Cancer Research UK’s chief clinician also based at the University of Southampton, said: “Seminoma is a great success story for the field of cancer research. The results of treatment with radiotherapy were already good, but the role of chemotherapy treatment had not been clear. This trial now shows that chemotherapy can cure early stage seminoma, so that men diagnosed with the disease can be successfully treated with fewer side effects.”

Sally Stenning, from the Medical Research Council Clinical Trials Unit, which ran the trial, said: “We are grateful to all the patients who took part in this trial and delighted by the results. Testicular cancer caught early is now one of the most curable forms of cancer. The MRC seminoma trials have therefore focussed on minimising the side effects of treatments both short and long-term, without compromising cure rates, to help young men diagnosed with the disease go on to lead the fullest possible life in the best of health.”

For media enquiries please contact Rachel Gonzaga on 020 7061 8252, or the out-of-hours duty press officer on 07050 264059.

Notes to editors:

* Germ cell cancers are cancers that start from cells used to make sperm or eggs.

About the University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is one of the UK’s leading research universities, offering first-rate opportunities and facilities for study and research across a

wide range of subjects in health, humanities, science and engineering.

The University, which has over 22,000 students, 5000 staff, and an annual turnover in the region of £350 million, is one of the country's top institutions for engineering, computer science and medicine, and home to a range of world-leading research centres. These include the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research, the Optoelectronics Research Centre, the Centre for the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, and the Mountbatten Centre for International Studies.

About the Medical Research Council (MRC)

The Medical Research Council supports the best scientific research to improve human health. Its work ranges from molecular level science to public health medicine and has led to pioneering discoveries in our understanding of the human body and the diseases which affect us all. www.mrc.ac.uk

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's premier forum for disseminating advances across all aspects of cancer research.

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.