SINGLE TREATMENT WITH EXPERIMENTAL DRUG GENERATES SIGNIFICANT HAIRY CELL LEUKEMIA REMISSIONS

SAN DIEGO, CALIF. May 18, 1992 -- A new cancer drug developed and tested at Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation in La Jolla, Calif. has generated a high number of complete remissions -- with a single course of treatment -- in hairy cell leukemia patients, according to Lawrence Piro, M.D., director of Scripps Clinic’s Green Cancer Center.

A relatively rare but usually fatal malignancy of the blood and bone marrow, hairy cell leukemia is seen in about 6,000 Americans with some 500 to 600 new cases each year.

As the principal investigator for clinical trials of the drug 2-chlorodeoxyadenosine (2-CdA), Piro presented the trial results at 11 a.m. today at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in San Diego, Calif. The title of his presentation was "Prolonged Complete Remissions Following 2-Chlorodeoxyadenosine (2-CdA) in Hairy Cell Leukemia."

Piro noted that 148 patients received a single seven-day intravenous infusion of 2-CdA. Of the 148, 126 (85 percent) obtained a complete response, 18 (12 percent) a partial response, three (two percent) did not respond. Following treatment, all 148 patients except two are alive today.
Fever was the only significant side effect noted with the drug. Whereas other forms of chemotherapy can cause significant nausea, vomiting, hair loss, conjunctivitis, skin rash or abnormal liver or kidney function, no significant reactions were seen with 2-CdA.

Piro and his colleagues first reported success with 2-CdA two years ago in the New England Journal of Medicine. Since those early trials with only 12 patients, "we've been able to demonstrate in a much larger population the efficacy of 2-CdA for hairy cell leukemia," he said.

Additional medical centers, including M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas; Long Island Jewish Hospital in New York; and Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois have tested 2-CdA "and have confirmed our observations that this is a highly effective and durable treatment for hairy cell leukemia," Piro added.

The National Cancer Institute is also sponsoring trials to investigate additional applications of 2-CdA, Piro said, noting that "this drug represents one type of a new group of drugs called nucleosides, which have had significant impact in cancer treatment."

Among the patients who've responded to the 2-CdA treatment is 46-year-old Cheryl Nichols of Mission Viejo, Calif. One of Scripps Clinic's more recent treatment recipients, she says "thanks to 2-CdA, I've just graduated from the masters program at the University of Southern California."
Last fall, Nichols noticed symptoms of fatigue and headache, "but I was married, a mother, holding down a part-time social work job, and trying to finish my master's degree. No wonder I was tired," she said.

What convinced her to see a doctor was her inability to concentrate on her studies. It got so bad that she had to drop classes.

Her doctor diagnosed hairy cell leukemia and suggested she be treated at Scripps Clinic. After treatment in December, she returned to school and graduated this month with a master of social work degree. Nichols said she hopes to find employment in cancer social work to utilize her experiences.

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