



Cervical Cancer News

Cervical Cancer Treatment Type Varies With Size of Radiation Facility

Researchers from the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston found that patients with cervical cancer treated at small radiation therapy facilities are less likely to receive short or aggressive treatment than those treated at larger facilities.

Researchers followed 442 women with cervical cancer from 1996–1999 who were treated at 55 randomly selected U.S. radiation treatment centers. They found that patients treated at facilities with less than 500 patients were less likely to have aggressive, high-dose treatments and more likely to have their treatment over 10 weeks. Previous research found that better control is achieved with shorter treatment times. Patients at small facilities also were more likely to receive only external beam radiation therapy rather than external and internal radiation. Previous research found that the combination treatment is more effective because it delivers a higher dose of radiation to the tumor over a shorter time frame.

The study was reported in the November 15, 2004, issue of the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology, Biology, Physics* (Vol. 60, pp. 1144–1153).

Cervical Cancer Vaccine Could Be Available by 2007

British researchers have said that a cervical cancer vaccine could be available as early as 2007. The vaccine, which would prevent human papillomavirus (HPV), would be given to girls before they are sexually active. Clinical trials have shown that the vaccine is 100% effective against the most common strains of HPV. Merck Sharp & Dohme and GlaxoSmithKline have developed a vaccine, and each is trying to get its product approved first.

Currently, cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women worldwide.

Liver Cancer Incidence Is Growing Faster Than Incidence of Other Cancers

According to the Liver Cancer Network, the incidence of liver cancer in the United States is increasing faster than any other cancer. The network's study of 250 patients also found that more than 52% of patients with liver cancer had hepatitis C and 87% had underlying liver disease. Twenty percent of patients had a history of alcohol abuse.

Liver cancer frequently is associated with chronic liver disease, so chemotherapy is ineffective because of poor drug metabolism. Liver transplant is usually the best treatment option for patients with liver cancer.

The study was presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases.

Dogs May Be Trained to Identify Bladder Cancer Markers

British researchers have found that dogs, with proper training, might be able to identify, by scent, chemicals emitted from cancerous cells in the urine of individuals with bladder cancer. Researchers trained six dogs of various breeds and ages to identify urine that contained cancer compounds by lying down next to the sample. The dogs then were tested with urine samples from 36 patients with bladder cancer and 108 healthy individuals. Each dog sniffed six healthy samples and one sample from a patient with cancer; the dogs detected the cancer samples an average of



41% of the time. The dogs had a 14% chance of selecting the correct samples accidentally. The researchers believe that dogs could be trained to help them identify markers for other types of cancer, as well.

For example, all of the dogs indicated the presence of cancer compounds in the urine of an individual from the control group who had been tested for and deemed free of bladder cancer. After further testing because of the dogs' response, the individual was found to have kidney cancer.

This study was reported in the September 25, 2004, issue of *BMJ* (Vol. 329, p. 712).

Skin Rash May Predict Cetuximab Efficacy

Researchers at the European Organization for the Research and Treatment of Cancer–National Cancer Institute–American Association for Cancer Research Symposium on Molecular Targets and Cancer Therapeutics in Geneva, Switzerland, reported that they found a strong correlation between the degree of skin toxicity in patients receiving cetuximab for metastatic colorectal cancer and the efficacy of the drug. Patients with more severe rash and larger areas of rash showed a higher response to treatment and longer survival.

The study followed 346 patients with advanced colorectal cancer that expressed epidermal growth factor receptor. The patients had failed at least two prior treatments with irinotecan, oxaliplatin, and a fluoropyrimidine. In the study, they received cetux-

imab starting at 400 mg/m² followed by 250 mg/m² weekly that continued until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity.

Eighty-seven percent of patients developed an acne-like rash during treatment, which is a common side effect. A total of 18% of patients with grade 2 rash and 24% with grade 3 rash responded to cetuximab, whereas only 8% with grade 1 and none with no rash showed a response. Median survival was 13 months with grade 2 rash and 8.9 months with grade 3 rash, compared to 4.9 and 2.1 months with grade 1 or no rash, respectively.

Although researchers are not clear on why this correlation occurs, a study has been launched to look at this issue further.