First pharmaceutical drug to improve survival amongst patients with advanced hepatocarcinoma

June 27 2008

International research involving the University Hospital of the University of Navarra, together with other hospitals in Spain, has shown that Sorafenib, an orally administered pharmaceutical medicine, results in patients with primary hepatocarcinomas (liver tumours) to live 40% more on average compared to those not taking the drug. The study, led by the Barcelona Hospital Clinic, will be shortly published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

This was one of the conclusions of a scientific meeting, organised by the University Hospital of Navarra in Pamplona, which dealt with novelties in the systematic treatment of hepatocarcinoma. Doctor Ruth Vera García, Head of the Oncological Medicine Service at the Hospital of Navarra, Doctor Javier Bustamante Schneider of the Digestive System Service at Cruces Hospital in Bilbao and Doctors Mercedes Iñarrairaegui Bastarrica and Bruno Sangro Gómez-Acebo, both from the Hepatology Unit of the University Hospital of Navarra, presented novelties in the systematic treatment of hepatocarcinoma. The medics coincided in emphasising that the complexity of these patients, often suffering from hepatic cirrhosis also, means that the disorder has to be approached in a multidisciplinary manner and treated at centres which have all possible treatment resources available.

The fifth most common tumour

Hepatocarcinoma is the most frequent hepatic tumour, fifth in overall worldwide cancer rates and the third cause of cancer deaths in the world. In Spain, as in the rest of Mediterranean Europe, some 10 cases per one hundred thousand inhabitants appear every year – a rate of about 500 cases in Spain annually (50 in Navarre). In more than half the cases local curative treatment such as surgery, transplant or percutaneous ablation; or palliative ones, such as arterial embolisation or radioembolisation with radioactive spheres, can be applied. In the rest of the cases, the prognosis is not good but, in the last five years, there have appeared more than ten pharmaceutical medicines known as biological agents or directed pharmaceutical drugs, the use of which in this tumour is currently being actively investigated, giving rise to a real hope for these patients. Of these pharmaceutical medicines, Sorafenib has been the first to demonstrate its efficacy and the European Medicines Agency has recently authorised its use for this tumour, given that it can prolong patient survival at the cost of some side effects which, in 80% of cases, are manageable with a number of preventative or therapeutic measures.

Source: Elhuyar Fundazioa

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