

Herceptin extends life of patients with terminal stomach cancer, study finds

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Breast cancer drug Herceptin can extend the lives of patients with incurable stomach cancer by nearly three months, according to an international study involving researchers from the University of Glasgow.

Data from the ToGA study presented at the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida showed that adding trastuzumab ([Herceptin](#)®) to standard chemotherapy prolongs the lives of patients with this aggressive [cancer](#) on average by nearly 2.7 months to 13.8 months, a 24% increase in survival.

Advanced stomach cancer is associated with a poor prognosis; the median survival time after diagnosis is approximately 10 months with currently available therapies.

Lead researcher in the UK, Prof. Jeff Evans, Cancer Research UK Professor of Translational Cancer Research, University of Glasgow, said: “This is the first time that we have shown that adding a biological treatment to chemotherapy can improve survival in this patient group and represents a significant advance in how we treat patients with this type of advanced gastric cancer. Trastuzumab’s efficacy in these patients with gastric cancer demonstrates the important principle that targeting HER-2 positive tumours is not restricted to [breast cancer](#).”

The international phase III study shows that trastuzumab given in combination with chemotherapy increases average survival by 24% in

patients with HER2-positive advanced and inoperable stomach cancer compared to chemotherapy alone. HER2 is a protein which results in more aggressive cancer with tumours growing at a faster rate than other forms of cancer.

This combination is also particularly beneficial to gastric cancer patients whose tumours express higher levels of HER2, increasing their median survival to 16 months.

Trastuzumab was the focus of intense media attention in 2005 when Patricia Hewitt, then Health Secretary, called for women with early stage HER2-positive breast cancer to be granted access to the treatment following data presented at ASCO showing that it offered unprecedented survival benefits.

[Gastric cancer](#) is the seventh most common cause of cancer-related death in the UK with over 8,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Early diagnosis is challenging because most patients do not show symptoms in the early stage. Approximately 22% of stomach tumours are HER2-positive. This rate is the same in Europe and in Asia, where stomach cancer is particularly frequent.

“Trastuzumab has brought significant benefit to women suffering from HER2-positive breast cancer. We are extremely pleased to see its impressive benefit extending to patients with stomach cancer,” said William M. Burns, CEO of Roche’s Pharmaceuticals Division. “The targeted therapy trastuzumab will become the new standard of care and we can make an important contribution in helping these patients live longer.”

Trastuzumab is already well established as the foundation of care for patients with HER2-positive breast cancer and now, based on the ToGA results, Roche will seek regulatory approvals for the use of trastuzumab

in HER2-positive advanced [stomach cancer](#).

Provided by University of Glasgow

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