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Studies prompt NIH to support new therapy for cervical cancer

IUSM researchers, along with researchers from several other universities, have demonstrated a new, more effective way to treat cervical cancer. The findings from five clinical trials are going to change the way the disease is treated, according to an announcement from the National Institutes of Health that will be mailed to thousands of physicians throughout the United States.

The National Cancer Institute is advising physicians to strongly consider adding the chemotherapy drug cisplatin to radiation therapy in the treatment of invasive cervical cancer. Until now, surgery or radiation therapy alone has been considered the standard treatment for this form of cancer. The New England Journal of Medicine will publish three of the studies in April, but due to the clinical significance of the information, also posted it on their Web site on Feb. 22.

Fred Stehman, MD, chairman of Obstetrics and Gynecology at IUSM, is chairman of the protocol committee for the Gynecologic Oncology Group (GOG), one of several NCI-sponsored networks that conduct trials jointly using the same protocols. The GOG enrolled the majority of patients in the five cervical cancer trials (1,506 of 1,912 total patients). Dr. Stehman led IU's participation in the trials and is an author of one of the studies.

"These findings will change the way all patients with cervical cancer are treated in North America," says Dr. Stehman. "This is the first group of studies to demonstrate that the theoretical advantage of adding two different treatments at the same time can be translated into a real survival advantage for patients."

IUSM was one of several institutions around the country that showed it is more effective to treat cervical cancer with combined chemotherapy/radiation treatment. Dr. Stehman says that after three years of following patients who volunteered for the studies, there was a clear benefit for the women who received the cisplatin/radiation combination.

The five different studies produced very similar findings. In all of the studies, patients had cervical cancer that had spread locally (within the cervix) or regionally (within the pelvis). While the chemotherapy regimens differed among the trials, all included the drug cisplatin, combined with radiation therapy, in at least one group of patients. And in each of the trials, that combination was the most beneficial.

"These findings are clear and remarkably consistent," said NCI Director Richard Klausner, MD. "They are likely to change the standard of care for invasive cervical cancer."

NCI's clinical announcement can be found at <http://cancertrials.nci.nih.gov>

BRIEFS

New administrator

Connie Dehghani has joined the IU Cancer Center as administrative coordinator of the Indiana Cancer Pavilion.

She will be working with the insurance coordinators and outpatient representatives to improve services at the facility. Previously, she was associated with the departments of orthopaedic surgery and radiology.

Seal of approval

Two IUSM physicians are named in the March 1999 issue of *Good Housekeeping* in an article on the nation's top cancer doctors.

The article, entitled "318 Top Cancer Doctors for Women," names Lawrence Einhorn, M.D., and George Sledge Jr., M.D.

Dr. Einhorn was one of 33 medical oncologists with an expertise in treating female patients with lung cancer named in the guide. Dr. Sledge was one of 35 medical oncologists specializing in the treatment of breast cancer to be named.

According to the article, 280 department chairmen and section chiefs in surgery and medical and radiation oncology at major medical centers across the country were polled to develop the list of 318

names.

Internet viewed as good source for health care info

The World Wide Web is becoming a popular source of health care information, according to a United Press International story dated Feb. 17.

The story cited a new Harris poll which stated that 60 million people have searched the Web in the past 12 months for health care information. That is 68 percent of the 88 million people with access to on-line information.

Generating the most searches were information for depression (19 percent), allergies or sinus problems (16 percent), cancer (15 percent), bipolar disorder (14 percent), arthritis or rheumatism (10 percent), high blood pressure (10 percent), migraine (9 percent), anxiety disorder (9 percent), heart disease (8 percent) and sleep disorders (8 percent).

The story also noted that Web surfers found that the most helpful health care sites belonged to medical societies (36 percent) and patient advocacy or support groups (32 percent).

Combined Seminar Series for March announced by IU Cancer Center

The Combined Seminar Series, hosted by the IU Cancer Center, will be from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. each Wednesday in March. The March lineup includes:

March 3 -- Peter Melera, PhD, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, University of Maryland, "Differential gene expression in CHL cells selected for growth in low folate: Over-expression of folate receptor alpha and metallothionein II."

March 10 -- John Essignmann, PhD, Department of Chemistry & Division of Bioengineering and Environmental Health, M.I.T., "Novel Toxins that Hijack Transcription Factors: Exploiting Lessons from the Anticancer Drug, Cisplatin"

March 17- -- David Levy, PhD, Department of Pathology, New York University School of Medicine, "Jak/Stat Signaling, Interferon, and Innate Immune Responses to Infection."

March 24 -- Ulrich Siebenlist, PhD, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, National Institutes of Health, "Development, Bone and Lymphoid Organs: New Roles for NF-kappaB."

March 31 -- Ronald Strauss, MD, 1999 Clyde Culbertson Lecturer, director, Degowin Blood Center, Department of Pathology, University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics, "The Rebirth of Granulocyte Transfusions: Fact or Fantasy?"

CIS coordinator begins new duties

Rivienne Shedd-Steele has been named the Indiana community outreach coordinator for the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service (CIS).

The Cancer Information Service is the source for the latest cancer information for patients and their families, the general public and health professionals.

Ms. Shedd-Steele, whose office is located in the Indiana Cancer Pavilion on the IU Medical Center campus, will work closely with members of the Indiana University Cancer Center.

Her focus will include increasing access and visibility of cancer clinical trials and providing outreach services to the medically underserved, including minority groups and individuals living in rural areas, who have limited access to health information and services.

The CIS continuously partners with state and regional organizations that directly serve these audiences. Additional CIS priority outreach initiatives will focus on breast and cervical cancer education, science awareness (research) and CIS promotion.

Before joining CIS, Ms. Shedd-Steele served as director of the Minority Cancer Awareness Coalition of the Little Red Door Cancer Agency in Indianapolis.

For additional information on Indiana's CIS programs, call 317-278-0073. To reach the National Cancer Institute hotline with questions about clinical care, call 1-800-4-CANCER.

Medical Ethics lecture slated for March 4

Srikant Sarangi, Center for Language and Communication Research at Cardiff University, will present "Managing Communications in Clinical Genetics" at the March 4 Seminar in Medical Ethics and

Humanities.

The presentation will be from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Medical Library, room 301.

<http://www.medicine.indiana.edu>
