

Reaching Out with Radioimmunotherapy

As more research makes its way to the clinical side, cancer patients have many more options for cancer treatment that are effective without decreasing their quality of life. One important development in oncology has been radioimmunotherapy (RIT), a novel technique that employs specially designed antibodies to deliver radioisotopes to targeted cells (usually cancer cells). The radiation then destroys those cells. Because the antibodies are designed to attach only to very specific types of cells, RIT maximizes the radiation that can be delivered to the diseased tissue and minimizes the amount of radiation to which healthy tissue is exposed.

One of the most promising areas of RIT is in the treatment of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Two radiolabeled antibodies by the trade names of Bexxar, supplied by MDS Nordion, and Zevalin, by Spectrum Pharmaceuticals, have been approved for treatment of follicular and B-cell non-Hodgkin lymphomas that have recurred or resisted treatment from standard chemotherapy. Results are very encouraging, with a high percentage of patients entering long-term remission. Novel RIT compounds are being tested in other cancers.

SNM recognizes the importance of RIT as a treatment option for patients and believes that it is at the cutting edge of cancer treatment. Because currently little information is available about RIT for patients and physicians, SNM has endeavored to create an RIT education and awareness program. The goals of this program, which is called RIT—Resources, Information, and Tools (RIT²), include helping patients identify centers in their geographic area that provide RIT and allowing for recognition of medical centers and medical staff that have adopted RIT.

To oversee this program and implement the steps needed to achieve its goals, SNM has appointed a multidisciplinary advisory board under the leadership of George Segall, MD, SNM president-elect and chair of the SNM Commission on Education (Stanford University School of Medicine, CA). The advisory board is composed of representatives from a variety of oncology specialties and patient advocacy organizations: R. Advani, MD (Stanford Comprehensive Cancer, CA); C.R. Divgi, MD (University of Pennsylvania, PA); S. L. Kipper (San Juan Capistrano, CA); S. Reyes, RN, BSN, OCN (Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, NY); J.A.

Thompson (Minneapolis, MN); D. Delbeke, MD, PhD (Vanderbilt University Medical Center, TN); J.P. Greer (Vanderbilt University Medical Center, TN); S.J. Knox, MD, PhD (Stanford University School of Medicine, CA); M. Pascu, JD (The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, VA); and B. Tomlinson, MPA, BSW (Lymphoma Research Foundation, CA).

The first task for the advisory board is to design a Web-based educational package about RIT. The package will include a set of practice guidelines, a customizable procedure manual template, case examples, an image atlas, step-by-step videos for nuclear medicine physicians and technologists that will include appropriateness criteria, educational handouts for oncologists, a reimbursement package, an electronic library, and links to other professional organizations. Much like the PET Center of Excellence's PET PROS website, which serves as a resource for referring physicians and patients about PET/CT, the RIT² website will contain a wealth of information that answers questions about RIT. Once the educational starter package has been created, SNM will seek additional ways to advance the use of RIT through associated events and materials.

Undertaking this important initiative will once again position SNM as a go-to resource for new and exciting applications of molecular imaging. In our mission to advance molecular imaging and therapy, we are providing patients with more options and paving the way for groundbreaking technologies, such as RIT, to be used to target and personalize cancer treatment. In addition, we are paving the way to adequate and appropriate reimbursement for RIT. The society is grateful to the people involved with this project and encourages all members to help us spread awareness about the RIT² program.



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