HAIRY CELL LEUKEMIA: SPLENECTOMY AFTER α-INTERFERON THERAPY

To the Editor:

Pangalis et al recently reported on six hairy cell leukemia (HCL) patients who underwent splenectomy after achievement of complete remission (CR) after α-interferon (α-IFN) therapy. They found HC infiltration of the red pulp in each patient and therefore recommended that CR criteria should be revised.

The Italian Cooperative Study Group for HCL (ICGHCL) is presently engaged in a study in which splenectomy is being performed in patients achieving CR. Patients in partial remission (PR) are randomized to splenectomy or observation. The objectives of the study are to evaluate the minimal residual disease and/or the possibility that splenectomy may improve failure-free survival (FFS). 1,2

Thus far, 107 patients have been evaluated: 16 patients achieved CR, 62 patients PR, 27 patients MR, and 2 patients NR. Twenty-four RP patients were randomized and 11 have already undergone splenectomy.

Ig heavy chain gene rearrangement (IgH) analysis has been performed on the spleen cells in 14 cases. Five of the seven splenectomized patients in CR have shown a germline pattern, thus suggesting that the disease may have been eliminated in the spleen as well as in the bone marrow.

On the other hand, six of the seven splenectomized patients in PR showed a rearrangement of the IgH chain gene region.

These preliminary findings suggest that in at least a minority of HCL patients, treatment with α-IFN may reduce residual disease to values below the detection limit of Southern blot analysis.

A prolonged follow-up is necessary to evaluate the impact of splenectomy for FFS.

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REFERENCES

Hairy cell leukemia: splenectomy after alpha-interferon therapy [letter; comment]

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