

## In the news

### RUNNING A MUC1

The UK press got carried away with a cancer story this week. It seems that a universal cancer vaccine is on its way, despite the fact that it has only been trialled in ten patients (with five more still to be recruited).

The news stories were generated as a result of a press release by Vaxil BioTherapeutics Ltd on 2 April, which reported their interim results from a Phase I/II trial of the vaccine ImMucin in patients with multiple myeloma. The peptide vaccine targets a specific sequence in the glycoprotein mucin 1 (MUC1), which is often overexpressed by cancer cells, but which is also widely expressed on normal cells. The press release clearly states that the interim data are based on seven of the ten patients who have completed treatment. It reports few side effects, evidence of an immune response in all patients treated to date and that three patients have shown a complete response. Somehow, these initial findings have been reported as evidence of a 'universal cancer vaccine that can treat 90% of cancers.' (*The Telegraph*, 8 Apr 2012). Many cancer types overexpress MUC1, but, as Kat Arney from Cancer Research UK pointed out, "These are very early results that are yet to be fully published, so there's a lot more work to be done to prove that this particular vaccine is safe and effective in cancer patients". (*The Telegraph*, 8 Apr 2012).

Perhaps part of the media scramble was prompted by the fact that MUC1 is overexpressed in cancers that are difficult to treat, such as ovarian cancer, and is also overexpressed in breast cancer, and as such "this exciting new approach could lead to treatments for breast cancer patients who have few options", Caitlin Palframan of Breakthrough Breast Cancer was quoted as saying. (*Mail Online*, 9 Apr 2012). MUC1 is being targeted by a number of other companies with a view to treating cancer, and it will be interesting to see whether their preliminary results also receive such coverage.

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