HAEMATOLOGICAL CANCER

Rituximab maintenance improves the outcome of elderly patients with FL

Rituximab maintenance after first-line chemoimmunotherapy in patients aged between 60–75 years with advanced follicular lymphoma (FL) is safe and effective, according to the results of a phase III trial.

In total, 234 patients with advanced FL with a median age of ~65 years were enrolled onto the trial. The participants began chemoimmunotherapy (four monthly courses of rituximab, fludarabine, mitoxantrone and dexamethasone, R-FND), which was followed by weekly rituximab consolidation for 4 weeks. 202 patients, who responded to this first-line therapy, were then randomly assigned to receive rituximab maintenance once every 2 months for a total of 8 months, or to observation only.

Assessment 3 months after the end of the maintenance phase showed 87% of patients in the maintenance group achieved complete remission compared with only 71% in the observation group ($P=0.006$). The 2-year progression-free

survival reached 81% in the patients who received rituximab maintenance compared with 69% of patients in the observation group. The investigators report that overall the maintenance therapy was well-tolerated. Serious infections occurred in 13 individuals, and only two deaths occurred owing to toxicity.

Over half of the patients with FL are over 60 years of age. Importantly, these data, therefore, support this regimen in elderly patients, although the investigators comment that the optimal dosing and duration of maintenance therapy is still to be determined.

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Original article Vitolo, U. *et al.* Rituximab maintenance compared with observation after brief first-line R-FND chemoimmunotherapy with rituximab consolidation in patients age older than 60 years with advanced follicular lymphoma: a phase III randomized study by the Fondazione Italiana Linfomi. *J. Clin. Oncol.* doi:10.1200/JCO.2012.44.8290