GASTROINTESTINAL CANCER

AVEX: opportunities in elderly patients with mCRC

Metastatic colorectal cancer (mCRC) mainly affects elderly people, with >60% of patients diagnosed at 65 years or older. Elderly patients are more likely to present with age-related comorbidities and, consequently, these patients are excluded from randomized trials. Observational studies have indicated survival benefits for elderly patients treated with bevacizumab and chemotherapy in the first-line setting. This prompted David Cunningham and coauthors to assess the efficacy and safety of bevacizumab in combination with capecitabine in elderly patients with mCRC (the AVEX trial).

In this randomized, open-label phase III study conducted in 40 centres, 280 patients with mCRC were randomly assigned in a 1:1 ratio to bevacizumab

and capecitabine or capecitabine alone. The median progression-free survival (PFS) was 9.1 months for patients receiving the bevacizumab combination and 5.1 months for the capecitabine control arm, an impressive difference in light of the disease setting. The overall response to treatment was also greater for the combination arm. More patients had dose modifications in the bevacizumab arm than the capecitabine-alone arm. Grade 3 or worse treatment-related adverse effects were higher for patients receiving the combination treatment. Serious adverse effects of $\geq$ grade 3 that were more common in patients receiving the bevacizumab combination were hypertension, haemorrhage and venous thromboembolic events.

The addition of bevacizumab to capecitabine significantly improved PFS, although overall survival was not significantly different between the two treatment groups. However, the safety profile for the combination was consistent with previous studies in this disease and, as the authors note, “this represents an important advance in the treatment of elderly patients with mCRC”.

Lisa Hutchinson

Original article Cunningham, D. *et al.* Bevacizumab plus capecitabine versus capecitabine alone in elderly patients with previously untreated metastatic colorectal cancer (AVEX): an open-label, randomized phase 3 trial. *Lancet Oncol.* doi:10/1016/S1470-2045(13)70154-2