In the news

FROM ASH 2015

The 2015 American Society of Hematology (ASH) annual meeting showcased the latest basic and clinical research in haematological malignancies. Key themes encompassed new insights into tumour heterogeneity and clonal evolution, and progress in personalized medicine and targeted therapy. Highlights included a plenary presentation by Stanley Chun-Wei Lee on spliceosomal modulation to treat myeloid leukaemias, and data presented by Richard Stone showing that the addition of midostaurin to chemotherapy improves survival in patients with *FLT3*-mutated acute myeloid leukaemia.

One of the stand-out stories from this meeting was the management of patients with multiple myeloma (MM). The past decade witnessed rapid advances in MM treatment, emphasized by the approval of three new drugs by the FDA in November 2015. The Ernest Beutler Prize lectures set the scene for reflecting on this progress, highlighting the contributions of Alfred Goldberg and Paul Richardson to the development of proteasome inhibitors for MM. An array of abstracts focused on the opportunities and challenges posed by the development of new and emerging MM targeted therapies, including the design of combination regimens and the identification of biomarkers for optimal treatment selection.

Several recent trials have addressed therapy for relapsed/refractory MM. For example, Saad Usmani presented promising results from a combined analysis of two studies on monotherapy with the anti-CD38 monoclonal antibody daratumumab, which showed an overall response rate of 31%. In addition, Paul Richardson presented the extended 3-year follow-up data from the ELOQUENT-2 phase III trial that demonstrated addition of elotuzumab to lenalidomide/dexamethasone increases progression-free survival with minimal added toxicity.

Late-breaking abstracts included the results from the first-in-man study of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells for advanced-stage MM, presented by James Kochenderfer. Treatment of 11 patients with autologous T cells modified to express a CAR targeting B-cell maturation antigen produced varied responses and toxicities; overall, the results indicate that this approach can produce strong anti-myeloma activity in patients who have failed previous therapies.

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