Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology | Published online 20 Dec 2016; doi:10.1038/nrclinonc.2016.213

In the news

FROM ENA 2016

At the 28th symposium on Molecular Targets and Cancer Therapeutics, jointly organized by the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC), the US National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), around 1,500 delegates from all over the world discussed future anticancer therapies. Over the years, this symposium (known as ENA) has brought together clinicians, academics, and members of the pharmaceutical industry to address an important question in clinical oncology: what's next?

In the past decade, we have witnessed the rapid emergence of effective anticancer strategies and, in concert, discovered escape mechanisms whereby tumours adapt and become resistant to the selective pressures of treatment. Thus, most discussions at ENA 2016 focused on the use of novel strategies to hijack therapeutic resistance, such as treatments based on targeted protein degradation, immune-cell targeting, or exploiting genomic instability and/or epigenetic regulatory programmes in tumour cells and their microenvironment.

A special focus was placed on both liquid biopsies and cellular therapies — two advances that have revolutionized the landscape of clinical oncology in recent years. Different investigators presented liquid biopsy as a tool that can be used in routine clinical practice, not only to enable detection and monitoring of tumour progression earlier than with conventional surveillance procedures, but also as a cost-effective alternative. For liquid biopsy approaches to be adopted widely in clinical settings, however, issues such as their utility as predictive tools, or the discrepancies observed when compared with other methods of tumour monitoring will need to be solved.

Finally, a session on exceptional responders and resistance was highly illustrative of the importance of understanding tumour biology to clinical decision-making. A translational bedside-to-bench-and-back-again model centred in clinical research, might prove key for the discovery of clinically meaningful anticancer strategies. One pertinent prediction is that we'll be discussing some of those strategies at ENA 2017.

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