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Treatment Advances in Myeloma Now Benefiting Other Blood Cancers
North Hollywood, CA, September 11, 2008

JOURNAL EDITORIAL DOCUMENTS DRAMATIC INCREASE IN SURVIVAL SINCE THE 1980'S

The International Myeloma Foundation (IMF)-supporting research and providing education, advocacy and support for myeloma patients, families, researchers and physicians-today said survival outcomes have improved dramatically for patients with multiple myeloma, cancer in the bone marrow that affects blood cell production. Writing in the October 10th edition of the Journal of Clinical Oncology, IMF chairman Brian G.M. Durie, M.D., notes that 25 years ago only 48 percent to 66 percent of myeloma patients survived two years, depending on which treatment was used. By contrast today, two-year survival rates are around 90 percent.

"What has changed is not the research capability, it is the availability of potent new classes of drugs without the side effects typically associated with chemotherapy," says Dr. Durie. "The successful agents in myeloma are multifunctional with a diverse impact on cell function and pathways. This may well be the secret of success."

The editorial explains that drug design was spurred by the discovery that thalidomide, originally developed as a sedative, was effective against myeloma through multiple mechanisms of action. As a result we have potent, targeted drugs such as Revlimid® and Velcade®, with improved outcomes.

"The benefits and comparisons are particularly interesting looking at the results with lenalidomide (Revlimid) plus low-dose dexamethasone (steroid) compared with prior results with interferon and levamisole. There is essentially a doubling of survival at two years, with preliminary evidence that this survival will be maintained for at least three to four years."

Dr. Durie notes these achievements with myeloma are now benefiting a wide range of blood cancers as these drugs are being tested in non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, chronic lymphocytic leukemia and other blood cancers. In the editorial he says the next step is to identify new agents with "greater efficacy or lesser toxicities" in this setting of already high response rates.

Dr. Durie is also affiliated with Aptium Oncology, and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and he is chairman of the Myeloma Committee of the Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG).