Fluorouracil, Imidazole Carboxamide Dimethyl Triazeno, Vincristine, and bis-Chloroethyl Nitrosourea (FIVB) in Colon Cancer

Geoffrey Falkson and Hêndré C. Falkson
Department of Cancer Chemotherapy, H. F. Verwoerd Hospital, Private Bag X169, Pretoria 0001, University of Pretoria, Republic of South Africa

Summary. One hundred and sixty patients with advanced metastatic colon cancer were treated with the drug combination of 5-fluorouracil (FU), imidazole carboxamide dimethyl triazeno (ICDT, DTIC), vincristine (VCR), and bis-chloroethyl nitrosourea (BCNU). All the agents were given in each cycle of treatment. The patients also received continuous ethylestranol. Special care was taken to ensure that the ICDT was not at any time exposed to light. Toxic effects included fall in hemoglobin, leukopenia, thrombocytopenia, alopecia, stomatitis, nausea and vomiting, and occasional diarrhea. Among 112 patients who had had no prior exposure to cytostatic agents, complete remission (CR) was recorded in 12, and partial remission (PR) in 31. The median duration of remission in these patients was 5.2 months. The median survival for the whole group was 8.4 months: for responders the median survival was 10 months, and for non-responders, 5.4 months. PR was also documented in 10 of 48 patients who had received prior treatment with FU or FU plus methyl-1,3-cis(2-chloroethyl-1-nitrosourea) (MeCCNU). Various drug combinations have been investigated in patients with metastatic colon cancer, and the failure of the combinations of FU plus cyclophosphamide (CTX) plus methotrexate (MTX) or FU plus CTX plus 1-2(chloroethyl)-3-cyclohexyl-1-nitrosourea (CCNU) [15] to improve upon the results reported with FU alone have led to conclusions that no drug combinations have been found that are superior to FU alone. When a drug known to be of no value in the treatment of colon cancer, such as CTX [11] is added to the FU regimen, the failure to improve FU results [2] is not surprising. Prospective randomized clinical trials of FU plus methyl-1,3-cis(2-chloroethyl)-1-nitrosourea (MeCCNU) plus VCR versus FU showed advantage for the three-drug combination [5, 10]. In studies in which MeCCNU was only given during alternate courses improved response rates were not confirmed for this combination [7]. The alternate-course scheduling of MeCCNU was used by the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG) and showed no statistical advantage over FU [4]. In ECOG randomized trials, slight but not statistically significant improvement resulted when DTIC was added [9]. In patients previously treated with FU, the response rate to MeCCNU plus ICDT was superior to MeCCNU plus VCR or MeCCNU plus B-2TGDR. Some therapeutic effect for DTIC is therefore confirmed. The light sensitivity of DTIC was demonstrated in 1962, and subsequent reconfirmation of the importance of this finding continues to be published [1, 8, 12]. None of the United States studies of DTIC in the treatment of colon cancer have ensured that precautions were taken to protect the drug from light.

Introduction

In 1974, in a randomized clinical trial, we found the four-drug combination of 5-fluorouracil (FU), imidazole carboxamide dimethyl triazeno (ICDT, DTIC), vincristine (VCR), and bis-chloroethyl nitrosourea (BCNU) (FIVB) superior to FU as a single agent in the treatment of patients with advanced colon cancer [6]. The value for the difference in the numbers of responders in the FU and FIVB groups indicated a one-in-four possibility that this had occurred by chance. Douwes has published results similar to ours with FIVB in advanced colon cancer [3].

Reprint requests should be addressed to: G. Falkson
survival than the treatment program in the ECOG studies [9].

The present paper deals with patients with metastatic colon cancer treated with the FIVB regimen, with a view to examining these results with reference to patient discriminants, drug scheduling, and administration, as well as ancillary treatment. Patients with rectum cancer are not included, as the pilot study of the FIVB combinations had shown this to be less active in rectum cancer [13, 14].

Materials and Methods

One hundred and sixty patients with measurable metastatic colon cancer were studied. Measurable and/or evaluable disease sites for all patients entered on study were liver metastases in 91, lung in 34, peritoneal mass in 58, and bone in four patients. A full blood count was performed and serum electrophoretic pattern, alkaline phosphatase, bilirubin, serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase, γGT, urea uric acid, and creatinines were done at the start of treatment and at regular intervals thereafter. Patients with a performance status (PS) of 4 were excluded from the study, as were patients with abnormal kidney functions or hemogram determination below normal. ECOG PS was used in 112 previously untreated patients. Patients with rectum cancer were not included in this series. At the start of treatment, the ratings were PS 0, 17; PS 1, 42; PS 2, 38; PS 3, 15. Loss of body mass of ≥ 10 kg within the preceding 6 months was recorded in 46 and a loss of less than 10 kg in 66 patients prior to entry on study.

Each treatment cycle consisted of (1) FU 450 mg/m² IV per day for 4–5 days, adjusted to the nearest 100-mg dose; (2) ICDT 260 mg/m² IV per day on days 1 and 2 of each cycle, adjusted to the nearest 100-mg dose; (3) VCR 1.0 mg/m² IV on day 1; (4) BCNU 50 mg/m² on day 1, adjusted to the nearest 100-mg dose; and (5) ethylestranol 2 mg twice daily throughout the treatment time, adjustment being necessary at least 3 days before the start of cycle 1. (Ethylestranol was added because of its hematopoietic supportive effect and also because of its general anabolic effect.) Subsequent treatment cycles were started on day 35 and at 5-weekly intervals thereafter. When cumulative hematopoietic toxicity occurred, treatment cycles were postponed and when a longer-term response was obtained, treatment cycles were restarted every 6th and later every 8th week. Particular attention was paid to the technique of drug administration. On day 1, an IV infusion of glucose in normal saline was started. Metoclopramide 1–2 mg was then injected into the tubing. When this had washed through, the FU was injected into the tubing and after 1 or 2 min the VCR was similarly injected into the tubing. The BCNU was freshly prepared and injected rapidly through the tubing, the speed of injection being dictated by the degree of venous spasm experienced by the patients. When the BCNU had been washed through, the ICDT was drawn up in such a way as to prevent all light exposure. An opaque syringe with opaque tubing between the point of entry of the needle and the patient's arm was used, to prevent exposure of the ICDT to light. If marked pain was experienced during ICDT administration, it was usually an indication that this agent had been exposed to light. In patients where the ICDT was accidentally exposed to light in the syringe or administration set, nausea and vomiting were usually more severe.

Three groups of patients were included: 112 patients with no prior treatment, 29 patients who had had prior treatment with FU, and 19 patients who had received prior FU plus MeCCNU.

Results

Toxic Effects

ECOG toxicity criteria were used, and the toxicity scores are set out fully in Table 1. The major side-effects encountered were hematopoietic suppression, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, and alopecia. Nausea and vomiting and diarrhea were never more than moderate, and always controllable. While hematopoietic suppression of grade 1 or 2 occurred in a large number of patients, severe or life-threatening hematopoietic toxicity was seen only in a few patients (see Table 1).

Therapeutic Effects

The therapeutic results were graded as follows: complete remission (CR), partial remission (PR) (shrinkage of all measurable lesions by at least 50%) improvement (IMP), no change (NC), and progressive disease (PD). If hepatomegaly was the primary indicator, there had to be a reduction of the sum of liver measurement below each costal margin at the midclavicular line and xiphoid process by at least 30%, with no worsening of pretreatment abnormalities of liver function. Subjective improvement and/or increase in body mass were not considered measurable criteria, but all patients who were graded as CR or PR and had good tumor shrinkage showed improved PS, and in many cases also gained weight.

Complete or partial remission was observed in 38% of patients with metastatic colon cancer treated with FIVB who had had no prior chemotherapy exposure. CR or PR was achieved in 26 (44%) of 59 previously untreated patients with a PS of 0–1, and in 17 (32%) of 53 patients with a PS of 2–3. A response was achieved by 31 (46%) of 66 patients in whom a weight loss of < 10 kg had been recorded at the start of treatment, and by 12 (26%) of 46 amongst whom a weight loss of ≥ 10 kg was recorded at the start of treatment. Among patients with prior exposure to chemotherapy, the response rate was 20%. Of the patients with no prior chemotherapy, 56% can be considered to have benefited from the treatment, while 37% of patients who had received prior FU or

1 0, fully active; 1, ambulatory, capable of light work; 2, in bed < 50% of time, capable of self-care but not work activities; 3, in bed > 50% of time, capable of only limited self-care; 4, inelible for study