

The European Oncological Disease Arena – In Brief

An Authoritative Round-up of Trends, Statistics and Clinical Research

Cancer Vaccines: Optimism for Market

Despite years of research and development (R&D) added to an enhanced understanding of tumour immunology, the cancer-vaccines market is still in its infancy. Early clinical trials progress has been decidedly mixed. Even when clinical development difficulties are overcome, commercial success has – so far – proved elusive for the few marketed cancer vaccines. The sector is reaching a critical point at which regulatory success stories are desperately needed. There is a renewed optimism over the launch of a blockbuster cervical cancer vaccine.

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Cancer Link

A Swedish study of 756 rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients with the most severe and prolonged incidents of swelling had a 70-times greater risk of contracting the lymphoma. The researchers may have solved the mystery of why RA patients face two times the normal risk of contracting the cancer. The connection between the two diseases lies in the chronic swelling caused by the arthritis. Their study showed that RA patients with moderate swelling were eight times more likely to develop lymphoma, compared with RA patients with lesser amounts of swelling.

The researchers found no increase in cancer risk from the use of medications for the treatment of RA. Researchers found that a key to preventing the cancer in RA patients is to aggressively treat the swelling associated with the disease (Baecklund E et al., *Arthritis & Rheumatism* (2006); 54: pp. 692–701).

FDA Moves to Speed New Drug Approvals

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced steps to accelerate the earliest phases of clinical research for important new medicines to treat such life-threatening conditions as cancer,

Figure 1: Main Causes of Cancer Deaths in EU

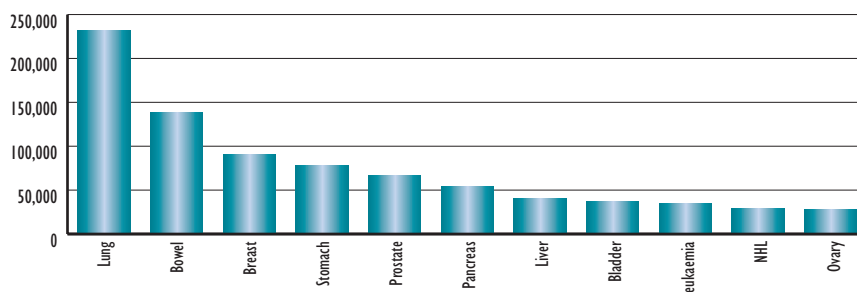
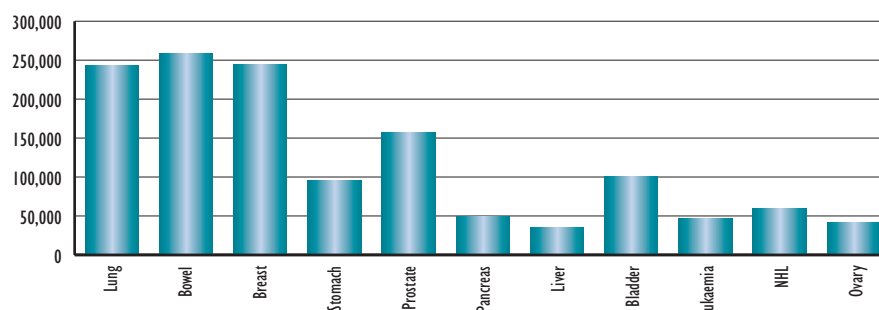


Figure 2: Newly Diagnosed Cancer Cases in EU



Source: Cancer Research UK

heart disease, and neurologic disorders.

The new approach will help more researchers conduct earlier, more informed studies of promising treatments so that patients have more rapid access to safer and more effective drugs.

Officials at the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) praised the FDA for taking action that may significantly reduce the time required to bring new-generation drugs to the market.

Arthritis Drug Lowers Colon Cancer Risk

A three-year clinical trial that compared Celebrex with sugar pills showed that the development of colon tumours was reduced by as much as 45%. All of the patients had had polyps of the colon removed previously. The results of two large studies show that the arthritis drug Celebrex dramatically lowered the risk of colon cancer in patients prone to the disease. Although a drug could prevent colon cancer, the researchers cautioned that problems with side effects such as

increased risks of heart attacks and stroke need consideration before the approach could become routine.

Although preliminary, the analysis pointed to the chance that patients at higher risk for heart problems could be identified ahead of time.

Pancreatic Cancer Trials Offer Positive Results

Data from phase III clinical trials on the use of Virulizin for treating pancreatic cancer revealed a significant survival benefit for a particular subgroup of patients. The randomised, double-blind, multicentre trial compared Virulizin plus gemcitabine with placebo plus gemcitabine in chemo-naïve patients with locally advanced or metastatic pancreatic cancer. As a first-line treatment, Virulizin did not show any statistical significance in overall survival, but it showed encouraging survival rates among patients with metastasis and patients with low Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group performance status. The results were presented at the 17th Congress on Anti Cancer Treatment in 2006. ■