

Pregabalin alleviates radiotherapy-related neuropathic pain



Patients with head and neck cancer who have neuropathic pain as a result of radiotherapy might benefit from pregabalin treatment, according to a recent study.

In the randomised trial, Jingru Jiang (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China) and colleagues enrolled 128 eligible adult patients from four centres in China, who were diagnosed with neuropathic pain associated with radiotherapy with an average pain intensity score of 4 or higher on an 11-point numeric rating scale lasting for at least 4 weeks. Between June, 2013, and October, 2016, patients were randomly assigned (1:1) to receive either a flexible dose of pregabalin (maximum dose four capsules of 75 mg twice daily; n=64) or placebo (n=64) for 16 weeks. The primary endpoints were pain reduction, and clinically meaningful (30%) and highly

meaningful (50%) pain reduction at week 16.

By week 16, patients had a reduction in pain intensity score of 2.44 (SD 1.52) in the pregabalin group and 1.58 (1.25) in the placebo group (adjusted difference 0.87 [95% CI 0.30–1.44]; p=0.003). 38 (59%) of 64 patients in the pregabalin group had at least 30% on the numeric rating scale versus 21 (33%) of 64 in the placebo group (absolute difference 26.56%, 95% CI 8.35–44.77%; p=0.006). 19 (30%) patients receiving pregabalin achieved pain relief of at least 50% compared with only five (8%) in the placebo group (21.88%, 7.33–36.42; p=0.003). The number of patients who had at least one adverse events did not differ between the groups: 35 (55%) in the pregabalin group versus 29 (45%) in the placebo group (p=0.29).

"This is the first randomised, controlled trial to investigate the

effective of analgesic treatment for radiotherapy-related neuropathic pain among head and neck cancer patients, and will therefore have a clinical impact", said corresponding author Yamei Tang (Sun Yat-sen University). "From a more general perspective, it may also provide therapeutic implications to chronic neuropathic pain due to radiotherapy on solid organ cancers."

"Safe and effective therapy is urgently needed for chronic pain in cancer survivors", commented Marieke van den Beuken-van Everdingen (Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands). "Although not ideal—with over half the patients experiencing at least one adverse effect—this study elegantly shows the benefits of pregabalin over placebo in radiation-induced pain in head and neck cancer patients."

Elizabeth Gourd



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Published Online
November 29, 2018
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045\(18\)30899-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(18)30899-4)
For the study by Jiang and colleagues see *J Clin Oncol* 2018; published online Nov 20. DOI:10.1200/JCO.18.00896.