Halving Chemotherapy for Testicular Cancer Appears Just as Effective

Reducing the treatment burden can reduce the risk of serious side effects, some of which can endure for years.

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Giving men who have undergone surgery for testicular cancer just one round of chemotherapy instead of the standard two does not appear to compromise the efficacy of treatment. This is good news for the young men who typically experience this cancer, because reducing the chemo burden can spare them serious side effects, some of which can endure over the long term.

Robert Huddart, MD, of The Institute of Cancer Research in London, and colleagues, including those at the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, conducted a study of 246 men with early-stage testicular cancer. The men, who all received surgery to remove a testicle, were deemed at high risk of a postsurgical recurrence of their cancer.

Instead of the standard two rounds of chemotherapy after surgery, these men received just one. (In standard practice, an alternate option is to give no postsurgical chemotherapy unless signs emerge that the cancer has returned.) Over the course of three weeks, the participants received treatment with a chemotherapy combination treatment known as BEP, which includes bleomycin, etoposide and the platinum agent cisplatin.

Two years following the end of treatment, just three men, or 1.3%, experienced a return of their testicular cancer. This rate was very close to the rate seen in previous studies of the standard two rounds of chemo for men with this cancer.

Forty-one percent of the men in the new study experienced at least one serious side effect during treatment, including infections, sepsis and vomiting. Just six (2.6%), however, went on to experience side effects over the long term, including hearing loss.

These side effect rates are lower than those seen in standard clinical practice, according to the researchers.

“This new trial is already changing clinical practice on a global scale and is set to improve patients’ quality of life as well as reducing the cost of testicular cancer treatment,” Huddart said in a press release. Referring to the United Kingdom’s National Health Service, he continued, “Reducing the

number of cycles and the dosage of chemotherapy for testicular cancer could save the NHS money and free up valuable hospital time and resources."

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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