Icotinib and whole-brain radiotherapy for the treatment in patients with brain metastases from EGFR-mutant nonsmall cell lung cancer

A retrospective study

Ai-Ying Jiang, MM\textsuperscript{a}, Jing Zhang, MD\textsuperscript{b}, Hai-Long Luo, MM\textsuperscript{c}, Feng Gao, MB\textsuperscript{d}, Yu-Feng Lv, MM\textsuperscript{a,}\textsuperscript{*}

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effect and toxicity of icotinib and whole-brain radiotherapy (IWBRT) for the treatment of brain metastases from nonsmall cell lung cancer (BMNSCLC) with epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR)-mutant among Chinese Han population.

A total of 55 patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC were included. They received orally icotinib (125 mg/tablet, 125 mg each time, 3 times daily) until disease progression. In addition, they also underwent whole-brain radiotherapy (3-Gy fractions once daily, 5 days weekly for a total dose of 30 Gy) in an attempt to extend their survival time. The outcomes consisted of complete response (CR), partial response (PR), stable disease (SD), progress disease (PD), overall response rate (ORR), progression-free survival (PFS), and overall survival (OS). In addition, toxicity was also recorded in this study.

The CR, PR, SD, PD, ORR, PFS, and OS were 38.2%, 52.8%, 5.4%, 3.6%, 90.1%, 12.5%, and 48.0% months, respectively. In addition, mild toxicity was observed in this study.

This study demonstrated that IWBRT is efficacious with acceptable toxicity for patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population.

Abbreviations: BMNSCLC = brain metastases from nonsmall cell lung cancer, CR = complete response, CSF = cerebrospinal fluid, EGFR = epidermal growth factor receptor, EGFR-TKIs = EGFR tyrosine kinase inhibitors, IWBRT = icotinib and whole-brain radiotherapy, NSCLC = nonsmall cell lung cancer, ORR = overall response rate, OS = overall survival, PD = progress disease, PR = partial response, WBRT = whole-brain radiotherapy.

Keywords: brain metastases, effect, icotinib, nonsmall cell lung cancer, toxicity, whole-brain radiotherapy.

1. Introduction

Lung cancer is one of the most common conditions in the respiratory diseases. It is also the most cause of cancer-related death around the world.\textsuperscript{[1–3]} Of this, nonsmall cell lung cancer (NSCLC) accounts for 80% to 85% of the whole lung cancers.\textsuperscript{[4,5]} It has been reported that among patients with NSCLC, approximately 20% to 40% may develop brain metastases.\textsuperscript{[6,7]}

Several treatment strategies are used to treat such condition, including medication combination,\textsuperscript{[8–12]} whole-brain radiotherapy (WBRT),\textsuperscript{[13,14]} stereotactic radiosurgery,\textsuperscript{[15–17]} and surgical resection.\textsuperscript{[18–20]} As for the WBRT, the median survival time of patients with brain metastases from nonsmall cell lung cancer (BMNSCLC) often affect by their ages, the tumors’ performance score, numbers, and location of metastatic lesions.

Icotinib, an epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) pathway inhibitor, is currently used as a new first-generation EGFR tyrosine kinase inhibitors (EGFR-TKIs).\textsuperscript{[13,21]} Its structure is similar with erlotinib. It utilized for the treatment in patients with NSCLC. Preclinical data have showed that icotinib enhances the efficacy in patients with BMNSCLC, when combined with WBRT.\textsuperscript{[13,14]} In addition, it is also not inferior to the patients with advanced NSCLC by treating with gefitinib.\textsuperscript{[21]}

Presently, limited data of icotinib and whole-brain radiotherapy (IWBRT) for the treatment of EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population have been reported. In this study, we retrospectively analyzed the effect and toxicity of IWBRT in patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population.

2. Patients and methods

2.1. Ethics

This study was formally approved by the Medical Ethical Committee of the Affiliated Hongqi Hospital of Mudanjiang
Medical University, and the informed consent was obtained from all patients. It was conducted at the Affiliated Hongqi Hospital of Mudanjiang Medical University from January 2011 to December 2013.

2.2. Patients

In this retrospective study, 55 patients with the diagnosis of BMNSCLC by computed tomography or magnetic resonance imaging scan were included. The clinical characteristics of all included patients are showed in Table 1. Patients aged from 31 to 78 years, with mean age of 63.1 years. All patients were EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC. All patients are Chinese Han ethnicity. Karnofsky performance score consisted of 100 (2 patients), 90 (15 patients), 80 (30 patients), and 70 (8 patients). The histology includes large cell carcinoma (11 patients), squamous cell carcinoma (5 patients), and adenocarcinoma (39 patients). In addition, 35 patients had <3 brain metastases, and 20 patients had >3 brain metastases. Furthermore, 37 patients had history or current smoking experience, and 18 patients never had smoking. Patients were excluded from this study if they had metastases to the other sites of the body, previously treated with EGFR anticancer therapy and WBRT, and patients with severe psychological conditions.

2.3. Intervention

All patients received orally icotinib tablets (125 mg/tablet, 125 mg each time, 3 times daily) until disease progression or adverse events became intolerable. In addition, they concurrently underwent WBRT with 3-Gy fractions once daily, 5 days weekly for a total dose of 30 Gy.

2.4. Outcome measurements

In this study, outcomes included complete response (CR), partial response (PR), stable disease, progress disease (PD), overall response rate (ORR), progression-free survival (PFS), and overall survival (OS). In addition, toxicity was also measured. The tumor size was measured according to the standard of Response Evaluation Criteria in Solid Tumors 1.1. Toxicity was evaluated by using the Common Toxicity Criteria for Adverse Events (V3.0).

2.5. Data analysis

PFS and OS were analyzed by the Kaplan–Meier method. The log-rank test was conducted to perform univariate analysis. All data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (Version 19.0, IBM Corp., Armonk, NY).

3. Results

The CR, PR, CD, PD, and ORR were 38.2%, 52.8%, 5.4%, 3.6%, and 90.1%, respectively (Table 2). The median PFS was 12.5 months (95% confidence interval: 6.8–18.2 months) (Fig. 1), and median OS was 22.3 months (95% confidence interval: 17.2–27.4 months) (Fig. 2).

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Table 1

| Characteristics                  | Value         |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Mean age, y                      | 63.1 (12.5)   |
| Sex                              |               |
| Male                             | 25 (45.5)     |
| Female                           | 30 (54.5)     |
| Ethnicity (Chinese Han)          | 55 (100.0)    |
| Marital status                   |               |
| Married                          | 36 (64.5)     |
| Divorced                         | 12 (21.8)     |
| Widowed                          | 7 (12.7)      |
| Karnofsky performance score      |               |
| 100                              | 2 (3.7)       |
| 90                               | 15 (27.3)     |
| 80                               | 30 (54.5)     |
| 70                               | 8 (14.5)      |
| EGFR mutant                      | 55 (100.0)    |
| Histology                        |               |
| Large cell carcinoma             | 11 (0.2)      |
| Squamous cell carcinoma          | 5 (0.1)       |
| Adenocarcinoma                   | 39 (70.9)     |
| Brain metastases, no.            |               |
| ≤3                               | 35 (63.6)     |
| >3                               | 20 (36.4)     |
| Smoking status                   |               |
| History or current               | 37 (62.3)     |
| Never                            | 18 (37.7)     |
| Extra-cranial metastases         |               |
| Absent                           | 23 (41.8)     |
| Present                          | 32 (58.2)     |

Data are present as mean ± standard deviation or number (%).

EGFR = epidermal growth factor receptor.

Table 2

| Value                | CR          | PR          | SD          | PD          | ORR         |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Response rate        | 21 (38.2)   | 29 (52.8)   | 3 (5.4)     | 2 (3.6)     | 50 (90.1)   |

Data are present as number (%).

CR = complete response, ORR = overall response rate, PD = progress disease, PR = partial response, SD = stable disease.
patients with NSCLC. Its results showed that icotinib could be investigated whether icotinib is noninferior to gefitinib and erlo-

IWBRT is efficacious and well tolerated in patients with BMNSCLC. The other study conducted a phase II study to assess the efficacy and safety of IWBRT in patients with BMNSCLC. Its results demonstrated that icotinib was associated with significantly longer intracranial PFS than WBRT combined with chemotherapy. It indicates that icotinib might be used as a better first-line therapeutic option for patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC.

The results of our study are consistent with the previous study. Our study found that the effect of IWBRT in patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population is promising with acceptable toxicity. The ORR was 90.1%. In addition, the median PFS and OS were 12.5 and 22.3 months, respectively. The total toxicity was mild without severe adverse events. The most frequencies’ toxicities were rash (43.6%) and nausea (41.8%).

There are several limitations in this study. First, this study had a relative small number of patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC, which may affect the results of this study. Then, this study only focused on the population of Chinese Han ethnicity. Thus, its effect and toxicity of other ethnicities of Chinese population should be investigated in the future. In addition, longer-term effect treatment and assessment should also be considered in the future study.

4. Discussion
Previous studies have investigated the efficacy and safety of IWBRT in patients with BMNSCLC. One study investigated whether icotinib is noninferior to gefitinib in patients with NSCLC. Its results showed that icotinib could be used as a new alternative therapy option for pretreated patients with advanced NSCLC. The other study conducted a phase II study to assess the efficacy and safety of IWBRT in Chinese patients with BMNSCLC, and also examined the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)/plasma concentrations of patients. It found that IWBRT is efficacious and well tolerated in patients with BMNSCLC. Other study explored the dose-escalation toxicity and efficacy of IWBRT on CSF penetration of EGFR-TKIs. The results of this study showed that IWBRT is well tolerated in EGFR-mutated patients with BMNSCLC, and up to the dose of 375 mg tid of icotinib was used. The concentration of CSF seemed to have a potential ceiling effect with the dose escalation. In addition, WBRT did not seem to significantly affect on CSF penetration of icotinib until 4 weeks after the treatment. Another study compared the efficacy of IWBRT with or without chemotherapy in a phase 3 trial in patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC. Its results demonstrated that icotinib was associated with significantly longer intracranial PFS than WBRT combine with chemotherapy. It indicates that icotinib might be used as a better first-line therapeutic option for patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC.

The results of this study demonstrated that IWBRT is effective in patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population, and has acceptable toxicity.

5. Conclusion
The results of this study demonstrated that IWBRT is effective in patients with EGFR-mutant BMNSCLC among Chinese Han population, and has acceptable toxicity.

Table 3: Toxicity-related treatment.

| Toxicity       | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | All grades |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| Nausea         | 23 (41.8) | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 23 (41.8) |
| Vomiting       | 5 (8.1)  | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 5 (8.1)   |
| Fatigue        | 3 (5.3)  | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 3 (5.3)   |
| Headache       | 16 (29.1)| 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 16 (29.1) |
| Dizziness      | 6 (10.9) | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 6 (10.9)  |
| Constipation   | 4 (7.2)  | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 4 (7.2)   |
| Diarrhea       | 6 (10.9) | 2 (3.6) | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 8 (14.5)  |
| Rash           | 19 (34.5)| 5 (8.1) | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 24 (43.6) |
| AST/ALT        | 8 (14.5) | 3 (5.3) | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 11 (20.0) |
| Dypsugia       | 1 (1.8)  | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 1 (1.8)   |
| Bilirubin      | 2 (3.6)  | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 0 (0)   | 2 (3.6)   |

Data are present as number (%).

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