TREATMENT-EMERGENT ENDOCRINE SYMPTOMS AND THE RISK OF BREAST CANCER RECURRENCE: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ATAC TRIAL

A retrospective study reported the incidence of vasomotor or joint symptoms and breast cancer recurrence in women undergoing endocrine treatment with anastrazole or tamoxifen in the Arimidex, Tamosifen, Alone or in Combination (ATAC) trial. It was hypothesised that when the mechanism of action behind treatment toxicity reflects the intended effect on the treatment target, the toxicity might be a useful marker for efficacy.

Women with hormone-receptor-positive tumours who reported vasomotor or joint symptoms – both linked to oestrogen depletion or oestrogen blockade – at the first follow-up visit (3 months) in the ATAC trial, (which assessed anastrozole or tamoxifen for adjuvant treatment of postmenopausal breast cancer), were compared with women without these symptoms to see if there was a relation between these symptoms and subsequent recurrence. It was reported that 1486 of 3964 (37.5%) women indicated newly emergent vasomotor symptoms at the 3-month follow-up visit and had lower subsequent recurrence than those who did not report these symptoms (223 during 10 752 women-years of follow-up versus 366 during 11 573 woman-years of follow-up, respectively; hazard ratio [HR] 0.84 [95% CI 0.71—1.00], p=0.04; adjusted for age, body-mass index, previous hormone-replacement therapy, nodal status, tumour size, and tumour grade). There was a greater decrease in breast cancer recurrence in 1245 of 3964 (31.4%) women who reported new joint symptoms at the 3-month follow-up visit as compared to those not reporting these symptoms (158 during 9242 women-years of follow-up versus 366 during 11 573 woman-years of follow-up; adjusted HR 0.60 [0.50—0.72], p<0.0001).

The authors suggest that the appearance of new vasomotor symptoms or joint symptoms within the first 3 months of treatment is a useful biomarker, and may suggest a greater response to endocrine treatment compared with women without these symptoms. It was opined that with awareness of the relation between early treatment-emergent symptoms and beneficial response to therapy, it might be useful when reassuring patients who present with them, and might help to improve long-term treatment adherence. The authors also cautioned that this relation needs to be confirmed prospectively.

Source: Cuzick J, et al. Treatment-emergent endocrine symptoms and the risk of breast cancer recurrence: a retrospective analysis of the ATAC trial. The Lancet Oncology: DOI: 10.1016/S1470-2045(08)70259-6

PATERNAL AGE AND ADVERSE BIRTH OUTCOMES: TEENAGER OR 40+, WHO IS AT RISK?

The effect of paternal age on pregnancy and birth outcomes was examined in a retrospective cohort study restricted to live singletons born to married, nulliparous women 20–29 years of age. This is due to missing information on paternal age being more prevalent in unmarried women than in married women, parity and multiple births being important risk factors for birth, as well as the age group having the lowest incidence of sub-fecundity. It was hypothesised that paternal effects have biological plausibility, as the placenta is largely dependent on the expression of genes of paternal origins and potentially harmful mutations may be more frequent among immature men and older men, leading to adverse birth outcomes.

The National Centre for Health Statistics (NCHS) database of the USA categorised paternal age into seven groups: <20, 20–29, 30–34, 35–39, 40–44, 45–49 and >50 years of age. Rates of adverse birth outcomes were calculated for each paternal age group. Adverse birth outcomes considered in this study included very pre-term delivery (live
such parties must firstly be legal and ethical even if no harm is posed to anyone aside from both parties, and the public should be educated that such a matter has an impact beyond a personal transaction.

Keith Lai, an attendee, who is a medical student, asked if it would be more acceptable if any monetary compensation is made later, as an afterthought. To this, most panelists felt that such a notion would be easily abused, with organ recipients claiming that money given “was an afterthought”.

The muddiest area which is an ethical minefield was with living unrelated donations, said Prof Alastair Campbell, Director, Centre for Biomedical Ethics, NUS. By having the option of organ compensation, this may also affect the donation rate in related donor pairs, because genetic bonds may induce a patient to refuse a relative’s organ due to the risks involved to the relative.

In response to the idea of setting a fixed price to an organ, Dr Chern said that the Ministry would monitor the changes made, and make adjustments (e.g. scale down the scheme) if necessary. He mentioned that public consultation would be conducted, and there would be an incentive to protect local Singaporeans, as well as foreigners.

“The inducement to foreigners will be intense, whether compensation is a fixed amount, or assessed by a committee”, said Dr Tan Chi Chiu, an attendee. The panel was of the opinion that a fine line separates reimbursement and compensation, and if the organ donor is paid too little, this would give rise to exploitation. On the other hand, if a donor is paid too much, the amount would be considered as inducement.

As panelists and attendees deliberated on the many suggestions and comments on compensation and reimbursement schemes, it was generally agreed that the subject was a complicated one. No quick and easy answers could be arrived at without extended deliberation between the public, government and medical sectors.

The Ethics Convention closed to rousing applause, and the Singapore Medical Association sincerely thanks all speakers, panelists and attendees for contributing to the success of the event.