

# TREATMENT OF LEUKEMIA AND LYMPHOMA

VOLUME EDITORS

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ADVANCES IN  
PHARMACOLOGY

# TREATMENT OF LEUKEMIA AND LYMPHOMA

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# **TREATMENT OF LEUKEMIA AND LYMPHOMA**

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## Preface

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In recent years, we have witnessed a paradigm shift in cancer treatment. Greater understanding of signaling pathways that regulate cell growth, cell cycle progression, and programmed cell death has provided new insights into the molecular mechanisms of disease. While traditional cytotoxic agents still form the backbone of cancer therapy, advances in molecular biology and immunology have led to the identification of novel therapeutic targets and treatment strategies. This volume highlights many of the major developments in biologically targeted, immunologic, and chemotherapeutic approaches to the treatment of leukemia and lymphoma over the past decade.

The remarkable activity of imatinib mesylate, an inhibitor of the ABL kinase of the BCR/ABL fusion protein that causes chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), provides “proof of concept” that molecularly targeted therapies will become an important new class of cancer therapeutics. In addition to describing the development and use of imatinib, Levis and Small (Chapter 1) examine other kinases, such as *flt-3*, that may be clinically useful targets. The success of imatinib in CML, however, has been difficult to translate to other malignancies. Unlike CML, where BCR/ABL is the causative molecular abnormality and may be the sole leukemogenic event early in the disease, single pathogenetic abnormalities do not exist for the vast majority of malignancies. For small-molecule inhibitors to achieve broader success, it is likely that the most useful agents will target early oncogenic events and that blocking multiple pathways critical for cell survival will be required for clinically meaningful responses. Estey (Chapter 4) provides a framework for investigating these new agents by addressing issues regarding patient selection, efficacy endpoints, and the need for comparative studies.

Like CML, acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) has become an ideal model for the study of molecularly targeted therapies. In contrast to the development of imatinib, however, which represents a rationally designed compound targeting specific molecular lesions, the success of empiric therapies in APL has led to a new biological understanding of the disease. Differentiation therapy with all-trans retinoic acid that directly targets PML-RAR $\alpha$ , the underlying molecular abnormality in APL, has produced complete remissions in up to 90% of patients. Similarly, arsenic trioxide, which degrades PML-RAR $\alpha$  and leads to non-terminal differentiation and apoptosis, has shown significant activity. Soignet and Maslak (Chapter 2) outline the current role of these agents in the treatment of APL.

Until the widespread application of molecularly targeted therapies proves more clinically useful, new chemotherapeutic agents will be required. An expanding knowledge of cancer biology has led to the development of a large number of novel drugs, including inhibitors of multi-drug resistance, angiogenesis, farnesyltransferase, and proteasomes, all comprehensively reviewed by Cortes (Chapter 3). Among the most promising therapeutic approaches, hypomethylating agents such as 5-azacitidine and decitabine, capable of activating silenced genes, have shown significant activity in myelodysplastic syndromes and acute myeloid leukemia (AML). Additionally, inhibition of histone deacetylases by phenylbutyrate, SAHA, and depsipeptide, among others, may reverse transcriptional repression caused by histone binding to DNA. In combination, hypomethylation and histone deacetylase inhibition provide an attractive therapeutic strategy for APL and other core binding-factor leukemias, where transcriptional block may play a particularly important role in leukemogenesis. Lamanna and Weiss (Chapter 5) focus on the purine analogs that have shown activity in lymphoid malignancies and the more recent clinical evidence leading to their use in a variety of applications, including non-meloablative stem cell transplantation and treatment of graft-versus-host disease.

Monoclonal antibodies have now become an important therapeutic modality for cancer, but the overly optimistic view of the early 1980s that they were “magic bullets” has now been replaced by a more realistic understanding of their therapeutic potential. The intrinsic immunologic activity seen with the anti-CD20 antibody rituximab against low-grade lymphoma has provided a foundation for further development of native antibody therapy. Lin and Byrd (Chapter 6) outline recent advances using this approach for the treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), including new therapeutic targets and chemoimmunotherapy combinations; Weiner and Link (Chapter 10) discuss similar applications for lymphoma.

In an effort to enhance potency, antibodies may be used as vehicles to deliver radioisotopes, drugs, and toxins directly to tumor cells. Weiner and Link discuss radioimmunotherapeutic approaches for lymphoma, including iodine-131-tositumomab and yttrium-90-ibritumomab tiuxetan. In

examining the radioimmunotherapy of leukemia, Burke and Jurcic (Chapter 8) highlight the use of  $\alpha$  particle-emitting isotopes, which may allow for more specific tumor cell killing compared to  $\beta$ -emitters. Sievers (Chapter 7) details the development of the anti-CD33-calicheamicin construct gemtuzumab ozogamicin for AML, while Rosenblum (Chapter 9) reviews various strategies for targeting toxins to tumor cells, including cytokines and growth factors, in addition to monoclonal antibodies.

While passive treatment with antibody-based therapies has shown potent anti-tumor effects, it represents only one immunotherapeutic approach. In addition to eliciting antibody responses, vaccine strategies may also produce T-cell responses that allow ongoing surveillance against tumor cells. Lu and colleagues (Chapter 11) review the biological basis of antileukemia immunity and highlight potential leukemia-associated target antigens. Timmerman (Chapter 12) focuses on therapeutic vaccines targeting lymphoma "idiotype." Farag and Caligiuri (Chapter 13) examine the use of cytokines to harness effector cells, including natural killer (NK) cells and monocytes, against autologous leukemia and lymphoma.

Passive cellular therapy has also gained a role in the management of hematologic malignancies, as demonstrated by the ability of donor lymphocyte infusions (DLIs) to induce durable complete remissions in CML. Ho and Alyea (Chapter 14) discuss the biological basis for a graft-versus-tumor effect, current clinical applications of DLI, and the development of non-myeloablative approaches for allogeneic stem cell transplantation. Finally, Brentjens and Sadelain (Chapter 15) explore the use of gene transfer techniques to engineer tumor cells capable of activating host immune cells, to modify dendritic cells to express tumor antigens, and to alter patient T-cell specificity to recognize antigens present on tumor cells.

The comprehensive reviews in this volume reflect our rapidly expanding knowledge of hematologic malignancies and should provide an exceptional resource for clinicians caring for patients with leukemia and lymphoma as well as clinical or laboratory researchers. In closing, we would like to thank all those who contributed to this collection and Tom August for the invitation to edit this volume.

*Joseph G. Jurcic  
David A. Scheinberg  
April 26, 2004*

# Contents

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Contributors xi

Preface xv

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## **Kinase Inhibitors in Leukemia**

Mark Levis and Donald Small

- I. Chapter Overview 1
- II. Introduction 2
- III. Factors in Identifying an Ideal Therapeutic Target 2
- IV. Kinase Targets in Leukemia: Current Treatment Options 5
- V. Kinase Targets in Leukemia: On the Horizon 14
- VI. Conclusions 20
- References 20

## **Therapy of Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia**

Steven Soignet and Peter Maslak

- I. Chapter Overview 35
- II. Introduction 35
- III. Disease Background and Biology 36

IV. Treatment Approaches	38
References	52

## **Investigational Agents in Myeloid Disorders**

Farhad Ravandi and Jorge Cortes

I. Chapter Overview	59
II. Introduction	60
III. Nucleoside Analogs	60
IV. Reversal of Multidrug Resistance	66
V. Biological Agents	68
VI. Signaling Modulators	74
VII. Conclusions	82
References	82

## **Methodologic Issues in Investigation of Targeted Therapies in Acute Myeloid Leukemia**

Elihu Estey

I. Chapter Overview	99
II. Introduction	99
III. Patient Selection for Targeted Therapy Trials in Acute Myeloid Leukemia	100
IV. Endpoints for Clinical Trials of TTs in AML	102
V. Need for Randomized Trials of TTs and a Proposed Statistical Design	103
References	106

## **Purine Analogs in Leukemia**

Nicole Lamanna and Mark Weiss

I. Chapter Overview	107
II. Introduction	107
III. Mechanisms of Action	108
IV. Purine Analogs in Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia	110
V. Purine Analogs in Hairy Cell Leukemia	114
VI. Purine Analogs in Acute Myeloid Leukemia	114
VII. Purine Analogs in Chronic Myeloid Leukemia	116
VIII. Purine Analogs in Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation	117
IX. Conclusion and Future Directions	118
References	118

## **Monoclonal Antibody Therapy in Lymphoid Leukemias**

Thomas S. Lin and John C. Byrd

- I. Chapter Overview 127
- II. Introduction 128
- III. Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia 130
- IV. T-Cell Prolymphocytic Leukemia 152
- V. Hairy Cell Leukemia 153
- VI. Conclusions 155
- References 156

## **Native Antibody and Antibody-Targeted Chemotherapy for Acute Myeloid Leukemia**

Eric L. Sievers

- I. Chapter Overview 169
- II. Introduction 170
- III. Lingering Questions Regarding Immunoconjugate Therapies 178
- IV. Summary 180
- References 181

## **Radioimmunotherapy of Leukemia**

John M. Burke and Joseph G. Jurcic

- I. Chapter Overview 185
- II. Introduction 186
- III. Antigenic Targets 186
- IV. Radioisotope Selection 187
- V. Radiolabeling 190
- VI. Pharmacokinetics and Dosimetry 193
- VII. Radioimmunotherapy with  $\beta$ -Particle Emitters 194
- VIII. Radioimmunotherapy with  $\alpha$ -Particle Emitters 199
- IX. Summary 202
- References 203

## **Immunotoxins and Toxin Constructs in the Treatment of Leukemia and Lymphoma**

Michael Rosenblum

- I. Chapter Overview 209
- II. Introduction 209

- III. “Targets of Opportunity” in Leukemia and Lymphoma 210  
References 221

## **Antibody Therapy of Lymphoma**

George J. Weiner and Brian K. Link

- I. Chapter Overview 229  
II. History 230  
III. Chimeric Anti-CD20—A Clinical Breakthrough 232  
IV. Alternative Molecular Targets 234  
V. Mechanisms of Action 236  
VI. Radioimmunotherapy 241  
VII. mAbs Combined with Chemotherapy 243  
VIII. mAbs Combined with Immunotherapy 246  
IX. Conclusion 247  
References 248

## **Vaccines in Leukemia**

Sijie Lu, Eric Wieder, Krishna Komanduri, Qing Ma, and Jeffrey J. Molldrem

- I. Chapter Overview 255  
II. Introduction 256  
III. Potential Target Antigens 257  
IV. Clinical Vaccine Trials with Leukemia-Associated Antigens 262  
V. Conclusion 264  
References 264

## **Therapeutic Idiotypic Vaccines for Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma**

John M. Timmerman

- I. Chapter Overview 271  
II. Introduction 272  
III. Development of the Idiotypic Vaccine Approach 272  
IV. Recombinant Idiotypic Vaccines 278  
V. Phase III Idiotypic Vaccine Trials 282  
VI. Pharmacologic Considerations and Integration with Standard Therapies 283  
VII. New and Ongoing Phase I/II Clinical Trials of Idiotypic Vaccination 285  
VIII. Conclusions and Future Prospects 287  
References 288

## **Cytokine Modulation of the Innate Immune System in the Treatment of Leukemia and Lymphoma**

Sherif S. Farag and Michael A. Caligiuri

- I. Chapter Overview 295
- II. Introduction 296
- III. Effector Cells of the Innate Immune System: Relevance to Cytokine Therapy 296
- IV. Cytokine Therapy: Exploiting Innate Immune Effectors 302
- V. Novel Approaches for the Immunomodulation of Leukemia and Lymphoma 306
- VI. Conclusion 311
- References 311

## **Donor Lymphocyte Infusions**

Vincent T. Ho and Edwin P. Alyea

- I. Chapter Overview 319
- II. Introduction 319
- III. Graft-Versus-Leukemia: Experimental Models 320
- IV. Donor Lymphocyte Infusions for Chronic Myeloid Leukemia 321
- V. Multiple Myeloma 324
- VI. Myelodysplastic Syndrome and Acute Leukemia 326
- VII. Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia and Lymphoma 327
- VIII. EBV-Associated Lymphoproliferative Disorders After Bone Marrow Transplantation 327
- IX. Complications of DLI 328
- X. Methods to Enhance the GVL Response after DLI 330
- XI. Mediators of the GVL Effect 330
- XII. Potential Targets of the GVL Effect 332
- XIII. Tumor-Specific Targets of the DLI/GVL Response 335
- XIV. Future Directions 336
- References 337

## **Somatic Cell Engineering and the Immunotherapy of Leukemias and Lymphomas**

Renier J. Brentjens and Michel Sadelain

- I. Chapter Overview 347
- II. Introduction 348



III. Immune Effector Cell Activation	350
IV. Immunization Against Hematologic Malignancies: Tumor Cell Vaccines	351
V. Immunization Against Hematologic Malignancies: Dendritic Cell Vaccines	357
VI. Adoptive T-Cell Therapy Directed Against Hematologic Malignancies	359
VII. Conclusion	362
References	363
Index	371
Contents of Previous Volumes	383