Infections Emerge Long After Cancer's Treatment

BY BRUCE JANCIN

DENVER — Long-term survivors of Hodgkin's lymphoma are at increased risk for pneumonia and other severe infections, even 20 years or more after the diagnosis of their malignancy, according to a Swedish national study.

Hospital registry data were analysed from all 6,946 Swedes diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma during 1965-1995. During a mean 11.8 years of follow-up, 104 of the patients developed severe infections requiring inpatient care. The infections occurred at least 1 year after diagnosis of the cancer, Dr. Anne Andersson said at the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research.

The experience of the Hodgkin's lymphoma patients was compared to the corresponding age- and gender-specific rates of hospitalization for severe infection among the general population. The Hodgkin's lymphoma patients had a 6-fold increased rate during years 1-9 after their cancer diagnosis. Their rate of severe infection during years 10-19 was 3.2-fold greater than average, and at 20 years and beyond, it was 2.9-fold greater, according to Dr. Andersson of Umea University.

Researchers have launched the ongoing prospective Swedish Hodgkin Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) study evaluating whether a structured surveillance strategy in patients diagnosed at age 45 or younger can reduce infectious and other late complications. Nearly half of the first 166 enrollees have had a splenectomy. The baseline rate of severe infection was 22% in patients with a spleen and statistically similar at 25% in those without a spleen. The finding suggests the increased infection risk may be due to an immunodeficiency, she said. ■

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