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Opinion Article

# Advancements in Intratumoral Immunotherapy: A Targeted Approach to Tumor Treatment

**Margie Degiuseppe***

*Department of Health and Clinical Analytics, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia*

## DESCRIPTION

Immunotherapy has emerged as one of the most advanced strategies in the battle against cancer, transforming treatment approaches across a range of malignancies. While traditional therapies like chemotherapy and radiation target cancer cells indirectly, immunotherapy enhances the body's immune system to specifically target and eliminate tumor cells. Among the various immunotherapy techniques, intratumoral immunotherapy a direct method of administering immune-modulating agents directly into the tumor-has emerged as a transformative innovation in cancer treatment.

Intratumoral immunotherapy involves the direct injection of therapeutic agents into the tumor site, designed to stimulate a local immune response against cancer cells. Unlike systemic therapies, which circulate through the bloodstream and affect the entire body, intratumoral therapy focuses treatment where it is needed most, in the tumor itself. This approach aims to activate the immune system within the tumor microenvironment, promoting tumor cell destruction and potentially enhancing the body's immune surveillance.

By directly targeting the tumor, this approach minimizes systemic toxicity and focuses on inducing a powerful immune response locally. The goal is to not only shrink the injected tumor but to also trigger systemic immune activity that can potentially target metastases and other tumors throughout the body, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of treatment.

### Types of intratumoral immunotherapies

Several strategies are being developed and tested in clinical trials for intratumoral immunotherapy, using a variety of agents and approaches to prime the immune system.

**Oncolytic virus therapy:** Oncolytic viruses are engineered to selectively infect and kill cancer cells while sparing normal tissues. These viruses can also induce a broader immune response by releasing tumor antigens into the surrounding tissue as the cancer cells die. For example, Talimogene Laherparepvec (T-VEC), an FDA-approved oncolytic virus, has shown efficacy in melanoma. By directly injecting T-VEC into melanoma tumors, the virus replicates within the cancer cells, causing their destruction while simultaneously triggering an immune response that targets residual tumor cells and distant metastases.

**Cytokine therapy:** Cytokines, such as interleukin-2 and interferon-alpha, play an important roles in activating immune cells, including T-cells and natural killer cells, which are involved in the direct elimination of cancer cells. Administering these cytokines directly into the tumor can amplify the local immune response. One of the major advantages of this localized approach is that it reduces the systemic side effects commonly associated with cytokine therapy when administered intravenously.

**Checkpoint inhibitors:** Immune checkpoint inhibitors like anti-Programmed Cell Death Protein 1(PD-1) and anti-Cytotoxic T-Lymphocyte Antigen 4 (CTLA-4) antibodies have transformed cancer immunotherapy by blocking the inhibitory signals that tumors use to escape immune detection. These inhibitors can be administered intratumorally, where they help regenerate immune cells that are otherwise suppressed by the tumor micro-environment. Direct administration allows for a higher local concentration of the drug and may lead to more effective activation of the immune system within the tumor.

**Cancer vaccines:** Intratumoral cancer vaccines involve injecting Tumor-Associated Antigens (TAAs) or whole tumor cells into the tumor site. These vaccines stimulate the immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells displaying these specific antigens. Some experimental vaccines also combine with adjuvants to enhance the immune response.

**Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) cell therapy:** CAR-T therapy is a innovative treatment that involves modifying a patient's T-cells to express a receptor that targets cancer cells. Intratumoral CAR-T cell therapy is an emerging strategy in which T-cells are administered directly into the tumor to improve their activity in the local tumor microenvironment.

**Correspondence to:** Margie Degiuseppe, Department of Health and Clinical Analytics, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, E-mail: margie.degiuseppe@menzies.edu.au

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## CONCLUSION

Intratumoral immunotherapy represents a innovative approach to cancer treatment, providing a direct method to target and eliminate tumors. With its ability to activate both local and systemic immune responses while minimizing systemic toxicity, this innovative strategy has the potential to revolutionize cancer therapy. As research progresses, overcoming the challenges related to tumor accessibility and improving treatment delivery will further enhance the effectiveness of intratumoral therapies, bringing to patients with hard-to-treat cancers.