

The Role of Immunotherapy in Palliative Care for Cancer Patients

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses the body's immune system to fight cancer. Unlike traditional cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy, which target cancer cells directly, immunotherapy works by stimulating the immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells.

Types of immunotherapy

Monoclonal antibodies: These are laboratory-produced molecules that can mimic the immune system's ability to recognize and attack cancer cells. These molecules can be designed to target specific proteins on the surface of cancer cells, making them more vulnerable to attack by the immune system.

Checkpoint inhibitors: These are drugs that block certain proteins on the surface of cancer cells or immune cells. By blocking these proteins, checkpoint inhibitors can help the immune system recognize and attack cancer cells more effectively.

CAR T-cell therapy: This involves taking a patient's own immune cells and modifying them in the laboratory to better recognize and attack cancer cells. These modified cells are then infused back into the patient's body, where they can seek out and destroy cancer cells.

Cancer vaccines: These are designed to stimulate the immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells. Unlike traditional vaccines, which are used to prevent infectious diseases, cancer vaccines are used to treat existing cancer.

Benefits of immunotherapy

Immunotherapy offers several potential benefits for cancer patients, including:

Fewer side effects: Unlike chemotherapy and radiation therapy, which can cause a wide range of side effects, immunotherapy is generally well-tolerated. This is because immunotherapy targets cancer cells specifically, leaving healthy cells unharmed.

Improved survival rates: Immunotherapy has been shown to improve survival rates in several types of cancer, including melanoma, lung cancer, and kidney cancer. In some cases, immunotherapy has even been shown to cure cancer.

Long-term protection: Unlike traditional cancer treatments, which may only provide temporary relief, immunotherapy can provide long-term protection against cancer recurrence. This is because immunotherapy works by stimulating the immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells, which can continue to provide protection even after treatment has ended.

Limitations of immunotherapy

While immunotherapy offers many potential benefits, there are also some limitations to consider, including:

Limited effectiveness: Immunotherapy is not effective for all types of cancer or for all patients. In some cases, the immune system may not respond to immunotherapy at all, making it an ineffective treatment option.

High cost: Immunotherapy can be very expensive, with some treatments costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. This can make it difficult for some patients to access this type of treatment, especially if they do not have insurance or if their insurance does not cover the cost.

Side effects: While immunotherapy is generally well-tolerated, some patients may experience side effects, including fatigue, fever, and nausea. In rare cases, immunotherapy can cause more serious side effects, such as inflammation of the lungs or liver.

Immunotherapy is an exciting new field of cancer treatment that offers many potential benefits for patients. By stimulating the immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells, immunotherapy can provide long-term protection against cancer recurrence and improve survival rates in several types of cancer. While there are some limitations to consider, such as the high cost and limited effectiveness for some patients, the potential benefits of immunotherapy make it an important area of research and development in the fight against cancer.

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