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Editorial Open Access

The Value of a Rapid Information Spreading for Rare Tumors: Open Access can be of Help

Massimo Serra*

Pharmacogenomics and Pharmacogenetics Research Unit, Laboratory of Experimental Oncology, Orthopaedic Rizzoli Institute, Bologna, Italy

A key question for people working in the field of rare tumors is: May the availability of Open Access journals accelerate and improve the spreading of information about the most recent research and clinical advances in rare neoplasms?

This question is particularly relevant for bone tumors. Bone tumors are rare neoplasms that account for less than 1% of all primary malignant human cancers. The most common bone tumor is osteosarcoma (OS), which is obviously classified as a "rare disease", since it affects no more than 1 per 2,000 persons. Due to their rarity, OS and the other bone tumors are therefore considered as orphan diseases and, consequently, any OS or bone tumor-specific newly developed drug should be included in the list of orphan drugs. The impact of OS and other bone tumors on the Pharmaceutical market is therefore much less relevant than the influence of other more frequent cancers. The current treatment standard for OS and the other most common bone tumors is based on the combination of multiagent chemotherapy (and, in some entities, of radiotherapy) with surgical removal of the tumor. The treatment protocols that are presently used have however reached a survival plateau and cannot achieve further significant improvements without causing severe life threatening adverse effects. New drugs and tailored treatments are therefore highly warranted to improve the cure rate of these neoplasms but the clinical evaluation of new drugs and innovative therapies, like in other very rare tumors, is a time-consuming process. Although the list of candidate therapeutic targets and novel drugs of potential interest for treatment of the most common bone tumors is already quite long, development of new treatment modalities is opposed by the rarity of these sarcomas. As a consequence of the low number of patients who can enter clinical studies, only few trials can be performed, and they usually last for years before providing meaningful conclusions.

In this situation, the possibility to obtain significant pre-clinical and clinical information about the efficacy of new treatments for bone tumor patients is very low. Moreover, information about the ongoing experimental or Phase I-II-III treatment regimens are often scarce and difficult to be found, despite some recently developed and continuously updated web sites are of great help (i.e. http://www.clinicaltrial.gov/ or http://sarcomahelp.org/clinical_trials/). On this background, online publication of research and clinical results, as well as the free and rapid availability of Open Access articles, may surely speed up the dissemination of information also for these diseases. The possibility to copy, distribute and adapt the work is very important also for teaching and educational purposes. The accessibility via internet of all the Open Access published articles without restrictions enables the attainment of an audience much larger than that of conventional subscription-based journals.

Therefore, the answer to the introductive question is: Yes, Open Access journals, especially on developing drugs, may accelerate and improve the spreading of research and clinical information in rare neoplasms, with a possible relevant impact on the evolution of treatment modalities for these orphan diseases. This Open Access availability will greatly aid not only people working in the field of rare tumors but also patients affected by these diseases to find the appropriate specialized Center for optimal treatment or even to enter new clinical studies.

***Corresponding author:** Massimo Serra, Pharmacogenomics and Pharmacogenetics Research Unit, Laboratory of Experimental Oncology, Orthopaedic Rizzoli Institute, Bologna, Italy, Tel: +39-051-6366 762; Fax: +39-051-6366 763/+39-051-6366 761; E-mail: massimo.serra@ior.it

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