

Trastuzumab — Mechanism of Action and Use in Clinical Practice

To the Editor: Uncertainty over the optimal duration of adjuvant trastuzumab therapy (5 July 2007 [1]) extends to optimal sequencing and long-term outcomes.

Rather than too few patients and events[1], low efficacy is the likelier cause of lacking significant improvements in disease-free survival (DFS) in the sequential arm of trial NCCTG-N9831[2] (relative risk reduction 13%[2]). This unpublished result, and the significant waning of efficacy in the HERA trial[3,4], casts doubt on the relative efficacy and durability of 12-month trastuzumab given sequentially to other chemotherapy.[4]

New Zealand funds the concurrent 9-week FinHer regimen[5] described by Dr. Hudis for HER-2 positive early breast cancer. A 12-month regimen is not currently funded – since doubt around sequencing, durability of efficacy, high cost and impact on hospital services, means unfavorable relative cost effectiveness.[4] Conversely, the comparable DFS improvements seen in FinHer[5] were sufficient for NZ's pharmaceutical funding agency, PHARMAC, to justify funding the concurrent 9-week regimen.[4]

To help resolve some of the unanswered questions[1], PHARMAC is part-funding the Synergy or Long Duration (SOLD) trial run by the FinHer investigators.[4,5]

Scott Metcalfe, MBChB, FAFPHM
PHARMAC
Wellington 6143
New Zealand
scott.metcalfe@pharmac.govt.nz

Jackie Evans, PhD
PHARMAC
Wellington 6143
New Zealand

References

1. Hudis CA. Trastuzumab--mechanism of action and use in clinical practice. *N Engl J Med.* 2007 Jul 5;357(1):39-51. <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/357/1/39>
2. Perez EA, Suman VJ, Davidson N, et al; on behalf of NCCTG, ECOG, SWOG, CALGB. Further Analysis of NCCTG-N9831, May 2005 update. Slide presentation presented at the 45th annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), Orlando, FL, May 16, 2005. http://www.asco.org/ac/1,1003,12-002511-00_18-0034-00_19-005815-00_21-001,00.asp
3. Hind D, Pilgrim H, Ward S. Questions about adjuvant trastuzumab still remain. *Lancet* 2007;369:3-5. <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS014067360760004X/fulltext>
4. Metcalfe S, Evans J, Priest G. PHARMAC funding of 9-week concurrent trastuzumab (Herceptin) for HER2-positive early breast cancer. *N Z Med J.* 2007 Jun 15;120(1256):U2593. <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/120-1256/2593/>; or <http://www.pharmac.govt.nz/pdf/290607a.pdf>
5. Joensuu H, Kellokumpu-Lehtinen PL, Bono P, et al; FinHer Study Investigators. Adjuvant docetaxel or vinorelbine with or without trastuzumab for breast cancer. *N Engl J Med.* 2006;354(8):809-20. <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/354/8/809>