Maintenance immunotherapy (NIVO or NIVO+IPI) fails to improve survival in Extensive Small Cell Lung Cancer

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GENEVA, Switzerland – Maintenance immunotherapy fails to improve survival in extensive-stage small cell lung cancer (SCLC), according to late-breaking results from the **CheckMate 451** study to be presented today at the European Lung Cancer Congress 2019. (1)

Around 60–70% of patients with SCLC have extensive disease at the time of diagnosis, meaning it has spread beyond a single lung and nearby lymph nodes and cannot be treated with radiotherapy. Most patients respond to chemotherapy, but the duration of the response is usually short, and their cancer grows within a short period of time. The standard approach after chemotherapy is to wait until the tumour grows before intervening. This study examined whether acting earlier, by giving maintenance immunotherapy after successful chemotherapy, would improve overall survival.

The study enrolled 834 patients with extensive-stage SCLC whose cancer did not progress after four cycles of chemotherapy. **Patients were randomly allocated in a 1:1:1 ratio to combination immunotherapy with nivolumab and ipilimumab, nivolumab alone, or placebo**. Patients were treated for two years or until cancer progression, death, or unacceptable toxicity.

Compared to placebo, overall survival was not significantly prolonged with combination immunotherapy (the primary endpoint) or with nivolumab alone.

Adverse event rates were 86% with nivolumab plus ipilimumab, 61% with nivolumab, and 50% with placebo. Rates of discontinuation due to toxicity were 31% with combination immunotherapy, 9% with nivolumab, and less than 1% with placebo. Treatment-related deaths occurred in seven (2.5%) patients on nivolumab plus ipilimumab, one patient on nivolumab, and one patient on placebo.

Predictive biomarkers will be crucial for identifying SCLC patients with small cell lung cancer who could be treated with immune checkpoint inhibitors and should be assessed within prospective studies to better understand the complexity of the immune response.

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