Pomalidomide in lenalidomide-refractory multiple myeloma and carfilzomib in refractory and newly diagnosed multiple myeloma

Pomalidomide and carfilzomib represent active and well-tolerated new options in combination regimens.

Two of the most promising drugs on the horizon for patients with multiple myeloma (MM) are pomalidomide and carfilzomib. Both agents have shown significant single-agent activity in clinical trials. They seem to work in patients whose MM is resistant to other treatments and are being studied in combination regimens.

Pomalidomide

Pomalidomide is a new immunomodulatory drug (IMiD) with high in vitro potency. In initial experience with pomalidomide and low-dose dexamethasone in relapsed MM, Lacy and colleagues found an overall response rate of 63% and observed responses in some patients who were refractory to lenalidomide (Revlimid), suggesting an absence of cross-resistance between pomalidomide and other IMiDs. In a recently reported phase II study, these investigators assessed the combination of pomalidomide and low-dose dexamethasone in patients with lenalidomide-refractory MM, finding the combination to be highly active and well tolerated.

In this study, 34 patients with lenalidomide-refractory MM were treated with oral pomalidomide (2 mg daily) and dexamethasone (40 mg once weekly) in 28-day cycles. Patients had a median age of 61.5 years, 68% were male, 85% had an ECOG (Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group) performance status of 0 or 1, and 41% were categorized as high risk. The median time from diagnosis was 62 months. The median number of prior chemotherapy regimens was four. In addition to lenalidomide, 58% of patients had received prior thalidomide (Thalomid), and 59% had received prior bortezomib (Velcade); 68% of patients had undergone prior autologous stem cell transplantation, and 53% had prior radiation therapy. Twenty patients (59%) had peripheral neuropathy at baseline.

Patients received a median of 5 cycles (range, 1−14) of pomalidomide plus low-dose dexamethasone. Prophylaxis for venous thromboembolism was given in 204 of 209 treatment cycles (aspirin in 150 cycles and warfarin in 54 cycles). Treatment responses consisted of a very good partial response in 9%, a partial response in 23%, and a minimal response in 15%, for an overall clinical benefit rate of 47%; 35% of patients had stable disease, and 18% had disease progression. The median time to response was 2 months. Response was observed in 8 of 14 (57%) high-risk patients, in 8 of 19 (42%) who received previous thalidomide treatment, and in 9 of 20 (45%) who were given previous bortezomib treatment. In eight patients with stable disease, the pomalidomide dose was increased to 4 mg/d, with one patient improving to a partial response. The median duration of response in 11 patients with a partial response or better was 9.1 months. The median progression-free survival was 12.7 months. The median overall survival was 23 months. The most common adverse events were neutropenia, anemia, and thrombocytopenia, and the most common grade 3−4 laboratory abnormality was increased creatinine.

Summary by Matt Stenger, MS.
vival was 4.8 months, and progression-free survival did not differ between high-risk and standard-risk patients. The median overall survival was 13.9 months. During follow-up, treatment was stopped due to disease progression in 23 patients, 3 withdrew from the study due to patient/physician discretion, and 8 continued to receive treatment. Seven patients died, all due to disease progression. The median follow-up of patients remaining alive was 8.3 months.

Pomalidomide/dexamethasone treatment was well tolerated. Toxicity consisted mostly of myelosuppression. Grade 3 or 4 hematologic toxicity at least possibly related to treatment occurred in 38% of patients, including neutropenia in 29%, anemia in 12%, and thrombocytopenia in 9%. The most common grade 3/4 nonhematologic toxicity was fatigue, which occurred in 9% of patients (all grade 3); grade 3 pneumonia, edema, pneumonia, and folliculitis were each observed in one patient. Nine patients (26%) had neuropathy during treatment (six grade 1, three grade 2); they included six patients with neuropathy at baseline, three of whom had a worsening of grade.

**Carfilzomib**

Carfilzomib is a highly selective epoxysketone proteasome inhibitor with minimal affinity for nontarget proteases. In a recent phase II trial in patients with relapsed/refractory MM, reported at the 2010 American Society of Hematology (ASH) meeting, carfilzomib produced durable responses and was well tolerated. An ongoing phase I/II trial assessing carfilzomib, lenalidomide, and dexamethasone in newly diagnosed MM, also reported at the 2010 ASH meeting, has shown good activity and tolerability of the regimen. A phase III trial comparing carfilzomib plus lenalidomide and low-dose dexamethasone versus lenalidomide and low-dose dexamethasone in relapsed MM has been initiated.

**Relapsed/refractory MM**

In the trial in patients with relapsed/refractory MM, 266 patients with multiply relapsed MM who had disease refractory to their last treatment received carfilzomib (20 mg/m² IV on days 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, and 16) every 28 days for the first cycle, with the dose then being escalated to 27 mg/m² on the same schedule for up to 12 cycles. Prior therapies included bortezomib, either lenalidomide or thalidomide, and an alkylating agent. Patients had a median duration of MM of 5.4 years and had received a median of 5 prior lines of chemotherapy and a median of 13 antymyeloma treatments; prior treatments included bortezomib in 99.6% of patients (a median of two prior regimens containing bortezomib), lenalidomide in 94%, thalidomide in 74%, corticosteroids in 98%, alkylating agents in 91%, and stem cell transplantation in 74%. Overall, 65% of patients were refractory to bortezomib prior to study entry.

At the time of reporting, 79 patients (30%) had completed at least 6 cycles of study treatment, approximately 11% had completed 12 cycles (with most entering an extension phase of the study), and 15 patients remained on study (all with more than 10 cycles of study treatment). Among 257 patients evaluable for response, 0.4% (one patient) had a complete response, 4.7% had a very good partial response, and 19% had a partial response, for an overall response rate of 24%; an additional 12% of patients had a minimal response, yielding an overall clinical benefit rate of 36%. Stable disease for at least 6 weeks was achieved in 32%. Among patients with a partial response or better, the median duration of response was 7.4 months. Among patients with a minimal response, the median duration of response was 6.3 months, indicating durable minor responses.

Toxicity consisted mainly of myelosuppression. Grade 3/4 hematologic toxicities consisted of thrombocytopenia in 18% of patients, lymphopenia in 11%, neutropenia in 8%, and anemia in 7%. Grade 3/4 nonhematologic toxicities included fatigue in 6% of patients; pneumonitis and congestive cardiac failure in 3% each; nausea, dyspnea, increased blood creatinine levels, and increased blood uric acid levels in 1% each; and diarrhea in 0.4%. Grade 1/2 peripheral neuropathy was present in 77% of patients at baseline; new-onset neuropathy was infrequent, with grade 3 or lower neuropathy occurring in less than 1% of patients.

**Newly diagnosed MM**

In an ongoing phase I/II trial, patients with newly diagnosed MM are receiving carfilzomib, lenalidomide, and dexamethasone. Carfilzomib is started at 20 mg/m² (dose level 1) and increased to 27 mg/m² (dose level 2) and 36 mg/m² (dose level 3) given IV on days 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, and 16 in 28-day cycles. Lenalidomide is given at 25 mg/d on days 1–21 in each cycle, and dexamethasone is given weekly at 40 mg during cycles 1–4 and at 20 mg during cycles 5–8. Patients with a partial response or better are eligible to proceed to stem cell collection and autologous stem cell transplantation after at least 4 cycles and can continue study treatment after transplantation. After completion of 8 cycles, patients are to receive maintenance cycles consisting of carfilzomib on days 1, 2, 15, and 16; lenalidomide on days 1–21; and weekly dexamethasone at doses tolerated at the end of 8 cycles. A planned 36 patients are to be treated at the carfilzomib maximum tolerated dose.

At the time of reporting, 24 patients had been enrolled, 4 at dose level 1, 14 at dose level 2, and 6 at dose level 3. Toxicity data were available for 21 patients, including 19 who completed
at least 1 cycle of treatment. A single
dose-limiting toxicity event was ob-
erved, consisting of nonfebrile neu-
tropenia in a patient at dose level 2.
The maximum tolerated dose had not
yet been reached. Grade 3/4 hematol-
ogy toxicities consisted of neutro-
penia in three patients, thrombocyto-
penia in three patients, and anemia in
one patient. Grade 3 nonhematolog-
ic toxicities included five cases of el-
vated blood glucose levels, deep vein
thrombosis during aspirin prophylaxis
in one patient, and fatigue in one pa-
tient. Emergent peripheral neuropathy
was observed in two patients, who de-
veloped grade 1 neuropathy.

At the time of reporting, 23 pa-
tients continued on treatment, with
20 having no need for dose modifi-
cations. After a median of 4 months
of treatment (range, 1–8 months), the
preliminary response rate in 19 eval-
able patients completing at least 1 cy-
cle was 100% with at least a partial
response, including 63% with a very
good partial response and 37% with
a complete response or near-com-
plete response. Partial responses were
observed in 17 of 19 patients after 1
cycle, with responses improving in all
patients with continuing treatment.
Seven patients had proceeded to stem
cell collection using growth factors
only after a median of 4 cycles, and all
resumed study treatment after stem
cell collection. No disease progression
had been observed in any of the eval-
uable patients, and all remained alive.

References
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Although multiple myelo-
ama (MM) remains an in-
curable bone marrow can-
cer, survival rates have
improved markedly over the past de-
cade. An understanding of MM patho-
obiology (Figure 1) and improvement in
stem cell transplantation, better sup-
portive care, and novel therapies with
higher efficacy and lower toxicity are all
responsible for this improvement. The
availability of a rich pipeline of novel
treatment strategies with thalidomide (Thalomid), lenalid-
omide (Revlimid), and bortezomib
(Velcade) as important backbone drugs
in these approaches. In the upfront
setting, thalidomide with dexametha-
sone4 and bortezomib in combination
with melphalan and prednisone5 in-
creased the overall response rate and

From the Oncologist’s Perspective
Evolving therapies for multiple myeloma

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Current treatment

Over the past several years, five
therapeutic strategies have received
US Food and Drug Administration
(FDA) approval either as monothera-
py or in combination for treating MM,

FIGURE 1 Development of multiple myeloma: cellular/cytokine pathways. DC = dendritic cell; NK = natural killer cell; T, B = T and B cells. © Celgene Corporation.