UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA CANCER CENTER
HUMAN IMMUNE THERAPY CENTER
"Targeting Cancer with the Immune System"

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Ovarian Cancer Vaccine Trial Opens

In May of 2003, the anticipated ovarian cancer vaccine trial (OVA 2) opened under the direction of Dr. William Irvin. The trial will evaluate the immune response of vaccination in patients with advanced ovarian cancer. The program was awarded $450,000 from the Cancer Research Institute. OVA 2 combines new approaches of immunotherapy with existing chemotherapies, thereby allowing researchers to evaluate the interaction between both therapies.

Colon Cancer Vaccine Trial Opens

In February, the colon cancer vaccine trial (GI 37) opened with Dr. Eugene Foley as the principal investigator.

GI 37 will evaluate a synthetic peptide vaccine in patients with resected stage IIB or III abdominal colon cancer. This is a novel treatment for colon cancer and will allow for the evaluation of the effects of immunotherapy when given after chemotherapy.

Melanoma Vaccine Programs Expanding to Other Institutions

An effort is being made to expand our clinical trials to institutions in other geographic areas, thereby providing patients with treatment options without traveling far for care. The protocol for vaccine trial MEL 43 will start the expansion and is currently being reviewed by Foxchase Cancer Center (Philadelphia, PA), MD Anderson Cancer Center (Houston, TX), and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (Pittsburgh, PA) with the hope that each institution will open the trial. Opening the MEL 43 trial at these institutions will lead efforts into expanding to more cancer programs across the country.

Two Faculty Members Recruited

Timothy Bullock, Ph.D. and David Mullins, Ph.D. are two scientists that have recently joined the immune therapy team. Dr. Bullock was born in England and obtained his Ph.D. after training at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

He also recently completed his postdoctoral training at the University of Virginia. Dr. Bullock was chosen after a national search due to his commitment to the immediate translation of laboratory science into clinical application.

Dr. Mullins obtained his Ph.D. from Virginia Tech where he completed novel work on the immune modulatory effect of the chemotherapy drug Taxol®. He also completed several years of postdoctoral training at the University of Virginia. Dr. Mullins is currently working with human T-cells to learn new ways of targeting them more effectively to tumor cells.

IN THIS ISSUE

FOCUS ON *Kim Bullock*

What she does for the Human Immune Therapy Center:
Kim is involved in protocol development for the HITC. Kim creates the plan for a clinical trial with input from other members of the various cancer teams. She then prepares and submits the paperwork necessary for a clinical trial to be approved by the appropriate regulatory committees.
Birthplace: Trenton, New Jersey
Degrees: B.A. in Biology from the University of Delaware; Ph.D. in Immunology from Thomas Jefferson University
Family: Kim and husband Tim have a 19-month-old daughter, Olivia, and a five-year-old black lab, Nevi.
Favorite activities: Watching movies, hiking, gardening, and walks on the Blue Ridge Parkway with husband and daughter.

SCIENCE

Melanoma Vaccine Trial Results Published

The paper for the MEL 31 protocol was recently submitted to the Journal of Clinical Oncology. The Journal reviewed the manuscript and published the results on November 1, 2003.

MEL 31 was designed to determine the clinical and immunologic responses to a multi-peptide melanoma vaccine regimen. The four peptides were administered with low dose IL-2 in granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factor in adjuvant or pulsed on dendritic cells.

The results are promising and support continued investigation of multi-peptide vaccines, particularly those administered in GM-CSF adjuvant.

The MEL 36 trial results were also submitted to and are currently being reviewed by the Journal of Clinical Oncology.

Q&A

What is a clinical trial?

Clinical trials are used to study new therapies for cancers as well as other diseases. In particular, the Human Immune Therapy Center focuses on therapies involving the immune system.

Clinical trials are important for answering specific scientific questions on how to better treat a given disease or cancer. Even the best results in the laboratory need to be tried in patients to get a more accurate conclusion of possible outcomes. Clinical trials will provide the data needed to evaluate a particular treatment and to decide if the treatment should be used in other patients with the same disease.

Another benefit of clinical trials is that they provide multiple options for treatment. Patients often exhaust all conventional therapies and therefore need alternatives.

Have questions?
Contact Melanie Mayer at mem8v@virginia.edu or (434) 243-2611 and have your questions answered in the next issue.

Helpful links…

National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov

U.Va. Cancer Center
www.uvacancer.com

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

Melanoma Patients' Information Page
www.mpip.org

ABOUT US…

What is the Human Immune Therapy Center?

The Human Immune Therapy Center (HITC) at the University of Virginia was developed with the goal of discovering novel immunotherapeutic approaches for the treatment of cancer. The aim is to initiate a non-toxic war on cancer cells through immune responses. The HITC was initially designed to focus on treatments for melanoma, but has since expanded to provide clinical investigators with the infrastructure to initiate, develop, and implement clinical trials for other cancers. The HITC has a unique set-up of dedicated personnel and the necessary lab space to complete the immunologic analyses associated with clinical trials. Data collected in the research laboratories are then used to create vaccine therapies for clinical trials at the University of Virginia. The HITC works closely with the Cancer Center at the University of Virginia to provide the best of care for our patients.

Current Trials:

MEL 38: Evaluation of the Effects of Local GM-CSF-in-Adjuvant Administration on Dendritic Cells in Skin of Melanoma Patients and in Sentinel Lymph Nodes

MEL 41: Evaluation of the Safety and Immunogenicity of Vaccination with Multiple Synthetic Melanoma Peptides

MEL 42: Phase II Trial for the Evaluation of the Efficacy of Vaccination with Synthetic Melanoma Peptides Administered with GM-CSF-in-Adjuvant in Patients with Advanced Melanoma

MEL 43: Evaluation of Local GM-CSF-in-Adjuvant and the Number of Vaccine Sites on Immunization with Multiple Synthetic Melanoma Peptides

To learn more about the MEL trials, contact ***Robyn Fink*** *at 434-924-2745 or rjr3n@virginia.edu.*

OVA 2: Evaluation of the Immunogenicity of Vaccination with Synthetic Peptides Mixed with GM-CSF-in-Adjuvant in Patients with Suboptimally De-bulked Advanced Ovarian Cancer

GI 37: Evaluation of the Immunogenicity of Vaccination with Her-2/neu and CEA derived Synthetic Peptides with GM-CSF-in-Adjuvant, in Patients with Resected Stage IIB or III Abdominal Colon Cancer

To learn more about OVA and GI trials, contact ***Deb Bliesner*** *at 434-982-1565 or dsb4f@virginia.edu*

CONTACT US

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DONATIONS

To make financial donations directly to the Human Immune Therapy Center, please contact Mark Ruffa at mar3e@virginia.edu or (434) 243-5721