

## Sunitinib increases overall survival rate in patients with renal cell carcinoma

**S**unitinib (Sutent; Pfizer) increases overall survival rate in patients with metastatic renal cell carcinoma, according to a recent study (*Journal of Clinical Oncology* early online publication; 1 June 2009).

The international, multicentre, randomised, phase III trial included 750 patients receiving sunitinib (n=375) or interferon alfa (n=375). Patients treated with sunitinib had an overall survival time of 26.4 months compared with patients treated with interferon alpha who had an overall survival time of 21.8 months. This benefit remained when pre-treatment prognostic risk factors were taken into the analysis.

The primary endpoint, progression free survival, had already been met at the interim analysis of the study (*New England Journal of Medicine* 2007;356:115–24). Following the positive interim results, some patients were crossed-over to receive sunitinib. A total of 33% of patients in the interferon

alpha group went on to receive sunitinib and 32% received other targeted therapies.

The authors concluded that sunitinib leads to improved prognosis with renal cell carcinoma.

Steve Williamson, consultant pharmacist in cancer services at Northumbria Healthcare and North of England Cancer Network, told *The British Journal of Clinical Pharmacy*: “The paper shows a survival advantage of at least five months. However the actual benefits of the drug may be greater than reported in the trial, since two thirds of the patients went on to receive the newer targeted therapies.”

He added: “The use tyrosine kinase inhibitors, such as sunitinib, and other targeted agents in renal cell carcinoma has transformed the management of the disease.”

NICE approved sunitinib for renal cell carcinoma earlier this year (*The British Journal of Clinical Pharmacy* 2009;1:37).

## Changes to HbA1c measurement units

**P**atients with diabetes will now have their haemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) levels measured in millimoles per mol as well measured as a percentage, the Department of Health has announced. This follows a consensus statement published in 2007 in which the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine called for measurements to be standardised worldwide (*Diabetes Care* 2007;30:2399–400).

Natasha Jacques, principal pharmacist in diabetes at the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust, told *The British Journal of Clinical Pharmacy*: “This change in reporting will make it easier for us to compare HbA1c results, not only throughout the UK but also worldwide, allowing easier interpretation and comparison of clinical trials.”

HbA1c levels, which give an indication of how high or low blood glucose levels have been over the previous two to three months, will be recorded in both units until 31 May 2011 when the measurement will be made in mmol/mol only.



Blood levels of HbA1c will be recorded in two units for the next two years

“We have two years to educate our patients about the new measurement value,” added Ms Jacques, “It is really important that they understand their own HbA1c level and target.”

A calculation tool for converting between the two HbA1c units has been developed by Diabetes UK, supported by Bristol-Myers Squibb and AstraZeneca. The tool is available online at [www.diabetes.org.uk/HbA1c](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/HbA1c).

## News in brief

### Cetuximab to be approved for colorectal cancer

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has issued a final appraisal determination for the use of cetuximab (Erbix; Merck Serono) in colorectal cancer. The guidance recommends cetuximab in combination with 5-fluorouracil, folinic acid and oxaliplatin (FOLFOX) for the first-line treatment of patients with EGFR-expressing, KRAS wild-type, metastatic colorectal cancer. Cetuximab is also recommended as a single agent in patients who have failed oxaliplatin- and irinotecan-based therapy and who are intolerant to irinotecan. NICE is expected to publish the final guidance next month.

### New oral contraceptive

The first estradiol-based oral contraceptive has been launched in the UK. The new preparation — estradiol valerate and dienogest (Qlaira; Bayer) — has been shown to be effective and generally well tolerated. The license application was based on phase III trials involving 2,266 women in which the pill was found to be over 99% effective, which is in-line with other oral contraceptives.

### Indicators for quality of care

A list of over 200 indicators of quality of care in the NHS has been published by the Department of Health and the NHS Information Centre. ‘Indicators for quality improvement’ cover aspects of patient safety, effectiveness of care and patient experience. Examples of safety indicators include the incidence of Meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteraemia and timely reporting of patient safety events to the National Reporting and Learning System. The indicators will provide a benchmarking resource which can be used for quality improvement.