

The Future of Colon Cancer Treatment

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Introduction

Colon cancer will affect 1 in 20 Americans in their lifetime. So how effective is chemotherapy for colon cancer? And perhaps more importantly, what's the latest in colon cancer treatment?

The headlines stemming from colon cancer treatment and prevention are abundant these days. From one source (medicalnewstoday.com) in the past month alone, there are news stories with headlines like, "... Scientists patent an effective drug for treating breast, colon, and skin cancers," and "Newly identified biomarker may help predict colon cancer progression, personalize therapy." So how do you break through the hype to what is truly breaking news in the prevention and treatment for colon cancer today?

Perhaps the most promising treatment is immunotherapy for colon cancer. Immunotherapy uses a patient's own immune system to fight cancer—something that is proving successful in treating many types of cancers, including melanoma, kidney cancer and lung cancer in study after study.

There are two types of immunotherapy for colon cancer and other types of cancer: active immunotherapy, which trains naturally occurring antibodies within the immune system to identify cancer cells as harmful, and to attack them; and passive immunotherapy, which uses lab-engineered monoclonal antibodies kill cancer cells. Both types spare perfectly healthy cells, unlike today's chemotherapy for colon cancer.

"Chemotherapy has come a long way in treating colon cancer," said Dr. Jorge Perez of Sierra Nevada Cancer Center in Carson City, Nevada. "But treatment innovation is important. I'm excited to explore the possibilities of immunotherapy."

Scientists are working diligently to prove that immunotherapy for colon cancer is more targeted and more successful than chemotherapy for colon cancer, and with fewer side effects too.

Immunotherapy for colon cancer is still in the early phases of clinical testing. However, successes in the study of

immunotherapy in other cancers are giving doctors and patients new hope for curing and preventing colon cancer in our lifetime.

The contrast is undeniable between immunotherapy and the current options for treatment of colon cancer, which include surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. While current treatments attack all fast-growing cells regardless of whether they're cancerous or not, immunotherapy selects only the cancerous cells to attack and kill.

In addition to immunotherapy and chemotherapy for colon cancer, there are also alternative and complementary therapies that some patients turn to after a diagnosis. Although they sound similar, they do not mean the same thing.

Alternative therapies are treatments that some choose instead of a doctor's medical treatment. These types of alternative treatments have typically not been tested scientifically to be safe and/or effective, and unfortunately, often postpone or take the place of scientifically tested treatments offer.

Complementary therapies, on the other hand, are used in conjunction with medically proven colon cancer treatments. These therapies are geared toward palliative care, or helping patients feel better. For example, meditation can reduce stress, peppermint tea can relieve nausea associated with colon cancer chemotherapy, and acupuncture has shown to relieve pain. According to the Mayo Clinic, no complementary or alternative therapies have been proven to cure colon cancer. However, certain treatments have given patients some relief of physical and emotional distress.

While the next great colon cancer treatment—immunotherapy for colon cancer—is not on the market just yet, there is promise of better, gentler treatment options. Experts encourage people with a colon cancer diagnosis to have an open dialogue with their doctor about the latest clinical trials, and about alternative and complementary therapies for colon cancer.

John Knutsen is an avid follower and sharer of advancements in the world of cancer. He believes that good news about chemotherapy for colon cancer and immunotherapy for colon cancer can and should spread faster than the disease itself.

