

Dr. Russell Cohen discusses the biologic therapy Vedolizumab

Video Transcript

Hi. I'm Dr. Russ Cohen from the University of Chicago. I'm a Professor of Medicine and the director of the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center. Today's quick bite is regarding a new medication vedolizumab, otherwise known as Entyvio. Vedolizumab is a very exciting addition to the group of medicines that we use to treat patients with inflammatory bowel disease. In fact, this is the very first medicine that was approved the same day for both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease by the FDA.

This medication is given by an IV every two months, although the first few months you get three doses kind of as a kick off to get your body set with the drug. One of the very exciting things about vedolizumab is that it seems to be a very safe medication. In fact, we're not aware of any major side effects from the medicine unless you're allergic to it. And we're not aware of any major concerns for infections or tumors arising from using a medicines such as vedolizumab.

One of the neat things about this medicine is how it works. So in patients with Crohn's and colitis, the problem is the white blood cells are attacking the intestines. Well, in order for the white blood cells to get into the intestines, they first have to get out of the bloodstream where they're patrolling around. It prevents the white blood cells from getting out of the blood vessels into the intestinal lining. As a result, there's is less influx of the white blood cells into the tissue. So the inflammation does not have many white blood cells, and over time we think it actually helps prevent the white blood cells from getting in and continuing new inflammation in these patients.

One of the nice things about vedolizumab, it's that we have some patients who can't be on other medicines because of problems they may have elsewhere in the body, such as previous lung infections or skin problems and joint issues. Since vedolizumab is only for the gut, we then can use this medicine in patients who may not be able to use other medicines if they were to have Crohn's and colitis plus other conditions.

Many patients wonder, well, this is a new medicine, how do we know that it's going to be safe for me? And I think that's a very good point. Although the medicine just came out in May of 2014, it actually has been under study for many years before that. Given the fact that it's specific for the intestines, our expectations were that we would not see problems with infections, or tumors, or other problems elsewhere in the body, and that actually has shown to be the case.

However, we do constantly monitor patients who are on medicines, whether they be new or old medications. And this information can be updated in the future. There will be many future medicines in the same family as vedolizumab if things go as planned. They're currently under investigation. Many of them are very specific for the intestinal lining only. And while the benefits are those that we might enjoy in gastrointestinal disease, that may not be a good choice for patients who maybe also have joint pains or skin reactions related to their Crohn's and colitis. Those patients may do better with a medicine that more broadly affects the body.

So the exciting part from today's quick bite is that a new medicine for both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis has come out. It's effective in both conditions. It works well long term, and it's something that offers our patients and their caregivers other options for Crohn's and colitis. This is Dr. Russ Cohen with today's quick bite.