Changing Paradigms in the Treatment of Renal Cancer

An Expert Interview with Ulka Vaishampayan

Karmanos Cancer Center, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, US

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17925/OHR.2018.14.1.20

Ulka Vaishampayan is an endowed Chair and Professor of Oncology and is the Chair of the Solid Tumor Division, Department of Oncology at Wayne State University (WSU), Detroit, Michigan, US. She is also the Director of the Phase I Clinical Trials Program at the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, Detroit, Michigan, US. Her focus of research and clinical experience is early therapeutics, drug development and clinical trials with a focus on genitourinary (GU) malignancies. She is the site principal investigator (PI) of the National Institutes of Health Research Project Cooperative Agreement (U01) grant for clinical trials and the co-PI of the Department of Defense Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium (PCCTC) research grant at WSU. She is a member of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) education committee and the chair of the GU-non prostate track. With 100+ peer reviewed publications archived in PubMed, she has published widely in esteemed journals such as New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of Clinical Oncology, Clinical Cancer Research, Cancer, and Journal of Urology. She has also authored numerous review articles, editorials, and book chapters.

Keywords
Renal cell carcinoma, ipilimumab, nivolumab, interleukin

Disclosure: Ulka Vaishampayan has nothing to disclose in relation to this article.

Review Process: This is an expert opinion piece and has not been submitted to external peer reviewers.

Authorship: All named authors meet the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) criteria for authorship of this manuscript, take responsibility for the integrity of the work as a whole, and have given final approval to the version to be published.

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Received: March 16, 2017

Published Online: April 23, 2018

Citation: Oncology & Hematology Review. 2018;14(1):20

Corresponding Author: Ulka Vaishampayan, Karmanos Cancer Center, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48201, US. E: vaishamu@karmanos.org

Support: No funding was received in the publication of this article.

Q. What are the currently approved treatment options for newly diagnosed patients with metastatic renal cell carcinoma (RCC)?

The currently approved therapies are of two different types: targeted therapy and immunotherapy. Between 2005 and 2014 the backbone of therapy in RCC was anti-angiogenic therapy and in 2015 immune therapy in the form of immune checkpoint inhibitors began to get US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. Currently there are about nine agents/regimens approved for RCC.

Q. How have the emergence of immune checkpoint inhibitors and targeted therapies affected the treatment paradigm for first-line treatment of RCC?

The treatment efficacy has improved remarkably and there is now the hope of long-term remission in metastatic RCC.

Q. What was the most exciting data to emerge in the past year supporting the use of these agents?

The most exciting data is from a study evaluating the combination of ipilimumab and nivolumab, which showed a long (>30 months) median overall survival. So the life expectancy in advanced RCC has about tripled in the last 20 years.1

Q. What patient factors would influence your choice of first-line agent?

There is an International Metastatic Renal-cell Carcinoma Database Consortium (IMDC) model and I use the risk stratification from this when I evaluate patients.2 Now that we have potential options such as bevacizumab and atezolizumab in combination showing efficacy in programmed death-ligand 1 (PDL-1) positive patients, this test may be worthwhile getting. Patients with bone metastases, symptomatic or rapidly progressive aggressive disease will likely need cabozantinib, a vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) and c-Met inhibitor tyrosine kinase inhibitor with an 80% chance of shrinking tumors.

Q: Is there still a place for high-dose interleukin (IL) in the treatment paradigm?

I still evaluate for front-line interleukin as this agent still has the longest track record of showing long-term remissions with 20-year follow up. Only about 10% of my patients with metastatic RCC will be candidates for IL-2. □