

SALVAGE CHEMOTHERAPY IN RECURRENT CERVICAL CANCER WITH BIWEEKLY PEGYLATED LIPOSOMAL DOXORUBICIN (LIPO-DOX)

Jen-Ruei Chen¹, Yuh-Cheng Yang^{1,2,3,4}, Tze-Chien Chen¹, Jerry Cheng-Yen Lai⁴, Shing-Jyh Chang^{1,5},
Chi-Long Chang¹, Kung-Liahng Wang^{1,3,6*}

¹Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Mackay Memorial Hospital, ²Taipei Medical University, ³Mackay Medicine, Nursing and Management College, ⁴Department of Medical Research, Mackay Memorial Hospital, Taipei, ⁵National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, and ⁶National Taipei College of Nursing, Taipei, Taiwan.

SUMMARY

Objective: To investigate the objective response rate to and tolerance of biweekly Lipo-Dox (TTY Biopharm Co. Ltd., Taipei, Taiwan) at a dosage of 20 mg/m² in previously treated patients with recurrent cervical cancer.

Materials and Methods: This study was performed as a Simon's two-stage phase II clinical trial. Ten patients with recurrent cervical cancer were enrolled between April 2003 and December 2005 at the Mackay Memorial Hospital. Lipo-Dox (20 mg/m² intravenous) diluted in 250 mL of 5% dextrose solution was administered at 2-weekly intervals.

Results: The mean age of the patients was 51 ± 11.1 years. The mean number of cycles of Lipo-Dox injection was 4.6 (range, 1–12 cycles). Nine patients (90%) had disease progression. Only one patient (10%) achieved a partial response, and this was also the only patient who experienced WHO grade 2 palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia, which led to treatment delay for 2 months. The median survival time was 2 months (range, 2–6 months). The majority of patients experienced grade 1 or 2 anemia (30%), leukopenia (20%) or thrombocytopenia (20%), and others exhibited symptoms of nausea and vomiting (30%).

Conclusion: Salvage chemotherapy with Lipo-Dox at a dose of 20 mg/m² administered at 2-weekly intervals produced limited responses in patients with recurrent cervical cancer. This trial will not proceed to the second stage. These results may discourage the management of recurrent cervical cancer with single-agent Lipo-Dox in future clinical trials. [*Taiwan J Obstet Gynecol* 2008;47(3):322–326]

Key Words: cervical cancer, chemotherapy, Lipo-Dox, recurrent, liposomal doxorubicin

Introduction

Carcinoma of the cervix (Cx Ca) remains a leading cause of cancer mortality in women worldwide. Approximately 500,000 women develop cervical cancer every year, resulting in an annual mortality of about 200,000 [1].

In Taiwan, cervical cancer is not only the most frequently reported cancer among women [2], but is also the most common female genital tract neoplasm [3,4], with an incidence of 16 per 100,000 women in 2002 [5]. Radical hysterectomy plus pelvic lymph node dissection is the standard treatment when disease is detected at an early stage (stages IA2–IIA). Concurrent chemo-radiotherapy (CCRT) remains the standard for locally-advanced disease (stages IIB–IVA) [6]. Patients with recurrent Cx Ca are difficult to treat with surgery and radiotherapy alone owing to the presence of distant metastases, and single-agent cisplatin represents the most common treatment option and most effective chemotherapeutic agent for treating recurrent or



*Correspondence to: Dr Kung-Liahng Wang, Division of Gynecologic Oncology, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Mackay Memorial Hospital, 92, Section 2, Chung-Shan North Road, Taipei, Taiwan.
E-mail: kl421229@ms6.hinet.net
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metastatic Cx Ca. Most patients achieve a clinically complete (CR) or partial response (PR) with cisplatin-based regimens. The response rates to cisplatin range from 40–60%, with average progression-free and overall survivals of 4.1 and 6.7 months, respectively [7]. In addition, the clinical application of cisplatin often results in obstructive uropathy and renal toxicity, which limits its use in some women. There is, therefore, an urgent need to identify new chemotherapeutic agents that are less toxic and have higher response rates and longer response durations for treating platinum-resistant squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) of the cervix.

Polyethylene glycol-coated (pegylated) liposomal doxorubicin (PLD) is designed for the delivery of a liposomal form of doxorubicin [8] (Caelyx, Schering Plough International, Kenilworth, NJ, USA) to the sites of solid tumors [9]. The efficacy of PLD in women has already been demonstrated in studies of ovarian carcinoma [10–12], breast cancer [13], and Kaposi sarcoma [14]. Lower risks of musculoskeletal disorders and alopecia, and fewer grade 3/4 toxicities have been shown in women with relapsed ovarian cancer when comparing single-agent PLD with paclitaxel [10] and topotecan [11,12], respectively.

Lipo-Dox (TTY BioPharm, Taipei, Taiwan) is a second-generation PLD drug containing distearoylphosphatidylcholine that has been commercially available in Taiwan since 1998. We have recently demonstrated, in a multicenter phase II trial, that Lipo-Dox at 45 mg/m² every 4 weeks is effective against recurrent, platinum-resistant epithelial ovarian cancer [15]. The purpose of this study was to extend these previous findings by investigating the activity of biweekly Lipo-Dox (20 mg/m²) in previously treated patients with recurrent Cx Ca at a single institution.

Materials and Methods

Previously treated patients diagnosed with recurrent Cx Ca between April 2003 and December 2005, and aged 18–75 years were eligible for inclusion in the study. Diagnoses were confirmed either by radiologic imaging studies (chest X-ray, computed tomography, technetium Tc 99 whole body bone scan) or by elevated tumor markers (SCC, carcinoembryonic antigen [CEA] or CA-125). All selected patients were required to fulfill the following diagnostic criteria: bone marrow function (granulocyte count > 1,500/mm³; platelet count > 100,000/mm³), renal function (creatinine level < 2.5 mg/dL), liver function (bilirubin and liver transaminases < 3.0 times the upper limit of institutional normal), cardiac function (left ventricular ejection fraction

> 50%), and Karnofsky performance status (> 60%). Detailed information on the patients was obtained directly from individual medical records and was carefully reviewed. Follow-up information was obtained from chart review of records of clinic visits and from correspondence with patients and physicians. Disease-free survival was defined as the period from the start of primary treatment until clinical or radiologic evidence of recurrence. The follow-up time was defined as the time from initial diagnosis to the time of death or last follow-up. All surviving patients were followed up until June 2006.

Each vial of Lipo-Dox contained 20 mg of PLD. Intravenous premedication was administered with 20 mg dexamethasone (Decadron; NV Organon, Oss, The Netherlands), 50 mg diphenhydramine hydrochloride (Vena; YF Chemical Corp., Taipei, Taiwan), and 300 mg cimetidine (Tagamet; GlaxoSmithKline, London, UK) 30 minutes before PLD infusion. Lipo-Dox (20 mg/m²) was diluted in 250 mL of 5% dextrose solution and was administered by intravenous infusion over 30 minutes at 2-weekly intervals. Granulocyte colony-stimulating factor was not recommended for prophylactic use but was allowed if grade 4 neutropenia occurred. Patients' responses were measured by pelvic examination, tumor markers (SCC, CEA or CA-125), and radiologic imaging studies including computed tomography scan. The laboratory examinations included complete blood counts and blood chemistry. Complete blood counts were performed biweekly to assess hematologic recovery. Treatment was delayed in patients experiencing serious hematologic and/nonhematologic toxicity. Patients were withdrawn from the study when evidence of disease progression or grade 3 toxicity was observed during treatment. Safety and toxicity were recorded and graded according to the Common Toxicity Criteria (version 2.0) of the U.S. National Cancer Institute. A CR was defined as complete disappearance of all evidence of disease (including image and tumor markers) for at least 4 weeks. A PR was defined as a > 50% decrease in the size of measurable lesions or the reduction of tumor markers for at least 4 weeks. Stable disease was defined as a reduction of < 50% or an increase of < 25% in the tumor size or tumor markers over a period of ≥ 3 months, and progressive disease was defined as an increase of > 25% in the tumor size or tumor markers compared with pretreatment values. All relevant data required for calculating response rates and survivorship were collected in this study.

The clinical trial was approved by the Institutional Review Boards and Ethics Committees of Mackay Memorial Hospital. Written informed consent in line with institutional guidelines was obtained at enrollment.

Statistics

This was a Simon's two-stage phase II clinical trial designed to evaluate the responses to Lipo-Dox in patients with recurrent Cx Ca. The sample size was calculated based on a hypothesized null proportion of 10%, 80% power, and type I error of 0.05. It allowed for the study to terminate prematurely if the test regimen was not effective. A tumor response rate of 30% was assumed in patients who received the study regimen. The accrual of ten patients would proceed to the second stage if treatment responses are observed in \geq two patients in the first stage, otherwise the trial would be terminated at the first stage. An additional 19 patients will be recruited for the second stage, and \geq six of these 29 patients would be required to show responses to conclude that the study regimen is effective.

Results

Ten patients with recurrent Cx Ca were enrolled in this clinical trial between April 2003 and December 2005 at the Mackay Memorial Hospital. All patients were adult females with a mean age of 51 ± 11.1 years (range, 33–67 years) at initial diagnosis. The most frequent histologic type was SCC (6/10, 60%), followed by adenocarcinoma (3/10, 30%) and adenosquamous carcinoma (1/10, 10%). The tumors were originally clinically staged as FIGO stage IB1 (6/10, 60%), stage IB2 (1/10, 10%), and stage IIA (3/10, 30%). All patients had received at least one line of chemotherapy with a platinum compound prior to study entry: six patients had received one chemotherapeutic regimen, two had received two regimens, one had received three regimens, and one patient had received six regimens. These patients were treated either by radical hysterectomy plus bilateral pelvic lymphadenectomy (7/10, 70%); weekly cisplatin CCRT at 40 mg/m²/week (2/10, 20%); or by total abdominal hysterectomy with postoperative CCRT (1/10, 10%). The median disease-free survival period was 11 months (range, 4–37 months) after primary treatment. The patients received salvage chemotherapy with PLD after confirmed recurrence. The clinical characteristics, treatment modalities and outcome data of individual patients were organized according to clinical stage, as shown in the Table.

A total of 46 courses of PLD were administered with a mean of 4.6 (range, 1–12) per patient. Only patient 9 (1/10, 10%) achieved PR with stationary tumor markers (CEA and SCC). This patient, who had a FIGO stage IIA SCC, received 12 cycles of Lipo-Dox. This was also the only patient who experienced WHO grade 2 palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia (PPE) after

Table. Clinical characteristics, treatment modalities and outcome data for patients with recurrent carcinoma of the cervix treated with biweekly Lipo-Dox ($n=10$)

Patient no.	Age (yr)	FIGO stage	Histology	Primary treatment	Site of recurrence	DFS (mo)	Total no. of Lipo-Dox injection cycles	Prior chemotherapy
1	33	IB1	Adeno-CA	RH + BSO + BPLND	Lung	37	6	IP
2	38	IB1	SCC	RH + BPLND	Lung pleural effusion	4	4	CCRT (cis-Pt), IP, Pac
3	49	IB1	Adeno-CA	RH + BSO + BPLND	Right acetabulum joint	7	6	CCRT (cis-Pt)
4	56	IB1	Adeno-CA	RH + BPLND	Bone, bowel, liver, lung	8	2	CCRT (cis-Pt)
5	58	IB1	SCC	Laparoscopic PALNS	Vulva	7	1	CCRT (cisPt+5FU)
6	67	IB1	SCC	TAH	Neck scalene lymph node	37	7	CCRT (cis-Pt), IP
7	40	IB2	SCC	BPLND + PALND	Cervical portion, parametrium	12	4	IP, weekly Epir
8	50	IIA	SCC	RH + BPLND	Lung	13	1	CCRT (cis-Pt), POB
9	62	IIA	SCC	RH + BPLND	Neck scalene lymph node	10	12	CCRT (cisPt+5FU)
10	57	IIA	Adeno-SCC	RH + BSO + BPLND	Lung	12	3	CCRT (cis-Pt), BOMP, IP, PacP, PacCarbo, weekly Epir

DFS = disease-free survival; Adeno-CA = adenocarcinoma; RH = radical hysterectomy; BSO = bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy; BPLND = bilateral pelvic lymph node dissection; IP = ifosfamide + cisplatin; SCC = squamous cell carcinoma; CCRT (cis-Pt) = cisplatin concurrent with radiotherapy; Pac = paclitaxel; PALNS = para-aortic lymph node dissection; CCRT (cisPt+5FU) = combined cisplatin/5-fluorouracil concurrent with radiotherapy; TAH = total abdominal hysterectomy; Epir = epirubicin; POB = cisplatin + vincristine + bleomycin; BOMP = cisplatin + vincristine + methotrexate; PacP = paclitaxel + cisplatin; PacCarbo = paclitaxel + carboplatin.



Figure. Patient 9 developed WHO grade 2 palmar-plantar erythrodysesthesia after six cycles of Lipo-Dox injection.

six cycles of Lipo-Dox injection (Figure), which delayed the next course of injections by 2 months. Nine patients (90%) had progressive disease. The majority of patients experienced grade 1 or 2 anemia (30%), leukopenia (20%) or thrombocytopenia (20%), and others exhibited symptoms of nausea and vomiting (30%). Five patients (50%) withdrew from the study after at least four cycles as a result of grade 3 neutropenia (three patients), grade 3/4 toxicities (one patient), and grade 3 thrombocytopenia (one patient). No cases of grade 3/4 leukopenia, thrombocytopenia or cardiotoxicity were observed. Four patients died after short-term treatment with Lipo-Dox (2–4 cycles) (4/10, 40%). The total response rate was 10% and the median survival time was 2 months (range, 2–6 months).

Discussion

Very few studies have addressed the activity of PLD in recurrent/metastatic pretreated Cx Ca. PLD produces higher intratumoral drug concentrations (4- to 11-fold), a longer circulation time, and better therapeutic responses than the free form of doxorubicin, and has a lower renal toxicity profile than cisplatin [16–18]. Verschraegen et al, in a phase II trial, reported a response rate of 38% with a combination of carboplatin plus PLD in 29 patients with recurrent SCC of Cx Ca [9]. However, Ferrandina et al reported a limited response rate in recurrent Cx Ca patients treated with PLD, and they terminated their clinical trial [19]. A Gynecologic Oncology Group phase II study [20] using Doxil (40 mg/m²) as second-line chemotherapy for SCC of the cervix was conducted to determine the level of activity in women with advanced and recurrent cervical cancer. Although 26 patients entered the study,

only three (11.1%) had PR, which was similar to the result in our study, where only one patient achieved PR (10%). The present data demonstrated that PLD had little activity in these patients in terms of overall response rate. Similar to studies reported by other researchers with recurrent epithelial ovarian carcinoma [10,11], the most common side effects for recurrent Cx Ca patients treated with PLD were nonhematologic, including stomatitis and PPE. PPE (also called hand-foot syndrome) is a cutaneous reaction typically involving the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. In our study, only one patient (10%) experienced nonhematologic toxicity, consisting of mild grade 2 PPE. The relatively low rate and low grade of PPE can be explained by the low-dose PLD administration. Most toxicities were grade 1 or 2. Lipo-Dox caused minor leukopenia, anemia, and thrombocytopenia. Grade 3 or 4 leukopenia or thrombocytopenia was not observed in this study.

Salvage chemotherapy with Lipo-Dox at a dose of 20 mg/m² every 2 weeks resulted in a limited response in patients with recurrent Cx Ca. This trial will not proceed to the second stage. These results may discourage the management of recurrent Cx Ca with single-agent Lipo-Dox in future clinical trials. However, the minimal hematologic toxicity of Lipo-Dox makes it an important candidate for incorporation with other chemotherapeutic agents, especially for the palliation, rather than the cure, of recurrent Cx Ca. Nevertheless, alternate chemotherapeutic agents or combination regimens with minimal renal toxicity are still an ongoing goal for future studies.

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