2020 Top Cancer Health Treatment Stories

COVID-19, FDA drug approvals and new approaches to treatment and quality of life stood out among this year's top stories.

December 28, 2020 By Liz Highleyman and Ian Anderson

As in all areas of health and medicine, COVID-19 dominated the cancer treatment news this year. In the early days of the pandemic, Cancer Health published a roundup of what people with cancer need to know about the new coronavirus (No. 1).

Since then, much has been learned. Studies have shown that people with lung cancer and blood cancers have a higher risk of severe COVID-19 and death, though people with other types of cancer may not fare worse (No. 3). Cancer treatment also influences COVID-19 outcomes, especially therapies that suppress the immune system (No. 4, No. 10). COVID-19 has led to a drop in cancer diagnosis (No. 9), delayed treatment and new challenges for clinical trials. (For more, see "COVID-19: Changing the Face of Cancer Care.") But there's light at the end of tunnel thanks to the authorization of the first COVID-19 vaccines in December, which experts say are safe for people with cancer.

Despite the pandemic, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was unusually busy approving new cancer treatments. The approvals included 11 novel targeted therapies, three antibody-drug conjugates, a new CAR-T therapy, more than a dozen additional indications for checkpoint inhibitor immunotherapy and two liquid biopsy blood tests that can help guide treatment.

The FDA also approved the Gardasil 9 human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for the prevention of mouth and throat cancer (No. 17). The American Cancer Society now recommends the vaccine—which also prevents cervical and anal cancer—for girls and boys starting at age 9. New research suggests that a single dose of the vaccine may offer as much protection as the current two- or three-dose regimens (No. 2).

The pandemic also did not slow down the flow of research findings—many of which were presented at virtual conferences this year—including new data on immunotherapy, cancer vaccines (No. 19) and quality of life (No. 5, No. 16).

Here are the Cancer Health treatment news stories with the most views this year:

1. What People With Cancer Need to Know About the New Coronavirus
Posted: March 2

2. Does a Single HPV Vaccine Dose Offer Enough Protection?
Posted: January 22

3. Cancer Patients With COVID-19 May Have Higher Risk of Severe Illness and Death
Posted: May 4

4. Active Cancer, Recent Chemo Linked to Higher COVID-19 Death Rates
Posted: June 9

5. What Are the Long-Term Side Effects of Prostate Cancer Treatment?
Posted: February 11

6. FDA Approves RET Inhibitor Retevmo for Lung and Thyroid Cancer
Posted: May 13

7. FDA Approves Immunotherapy Combo for Liver Cancer
Posted: April 1

8. FDA Approves Zepzelca for Metastatic Small-Cell Lung Cancer
Posted: June 16

9. COVID-19 Leads to Drop in Cancer Diagnosis
Posted: August 16

10. Does Cancer Treatment Increase COVID-19 Risk?
Posted: August 27

11. Should People With Fatty Liver Disease Be Monitored for Liver Cancer?
Posted: January 31

12. FDA Approves Tukysa for Metastatic Breast Cancer
Posted: April 20

13. Early Research Finds CBD May Help Combat Brain Cancer
Posted: May 12

14. FDA Approves Pemazyre as First Targeted Therapy for Cholangiocarcinoma
Posted: April 21

15. Could People With Metastatic Cancer Be Denied Ventilators for COVID-19?
Posted: March 25

16. Zytiga Linked to Better Quality of Life in Men With Prostate Cancer

Posted: February 19

17. FDA Approves HPV Vaccine for Prevention of Oral Cancer
Posted: July 9

18. Padcev Combo Continues to Show Promise for Advanced Bladder Cancer
Posted: February 16

19. Provenge Prostate Cancer Vaccine Linked to Longer Survival
Posted: February 17

20. Surgery for Metastatic Breast Cancer Does Not Improve Overall Survival
Posted: June 8

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