Can Injections Replace Infusions for Some Cancer Treatments?

Studies have yielded promising results for injectable versions of Keytruda, Tecentriq and more.

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Patients treated with immune checkpoint inhibitors may soon be able to get brief subcutaneous injections rather than intravenous infusions. Currently, these monoclonal antibodies are administered at an infusion center, a procedure that usually takes around half an hour.

Researchers recently reported that people with advanced kidney cancer who were randomly assigned to receive an injectable formulation of Opdivo (nivolumab) had drug concentrations, safety profiles and response rates similar to those of patients who received the drug by IV infusion. The injections cut treatment time from 30 minutes to less than five minutes.

Studies have also yielded promising results for injectable versions of Keytruda (pembrolizumab) and Tecentriq (atezolizumab); the latter is already approved in the United Kingdom. Injectable checkpoint inhibitors could be administered at a local doctor's office, making treatment more convenient and accessible.

"Having the option to administer immunotherapy subcutaneously could undoubtedly reduce the treatment burden that patients diagnosed with cancer currently face as well as help maximize efficiencies within health care systems," says Saby George, MD, of Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center.