Immunotherapy for People With HIV

Could new cancer drugs restore immune responses against HIV?

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As people with HIV live longer thanks to effective antiretroviral therapy, non-AIDS cancers have become a major concern. But HIV-positive people are often excluded from clinical trials of new cancer treatments.

Michael Cook, MD, and Chul Kim, MD, PhD, of Georgetown University in Washington, DC, searched the PubMed database and conference abstracts and identified 73 HIV-positive people who used checkpoint inhibitors such as Keytruda (pembrolizumab) or Opdivo (nivolumab).

Overall response rates were 30% for people with non-small-cell lung cancer and 27% for those with melanoma, similar to rates seen in people without HIV. Checkpoint inhibitors were generally well tolerated. Most people with undetectable HIV maintained viral suppression, and five of the six with detectable HIV before treatment saw a decrease in their viral load.

“There are signals in this analysis and other studies that suggest these new cancer drugs may restore an immune response against HIV in patients whose immune system is exhausted by its long fight with HIV,” says Kim.

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