



New Therapy for Merkel Cell Carcinoma (MCC), a Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer

Germame Ajebo* and Zhonglin Hao

Department of Internal Medicine, Georgia Cancer Center, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta University, USA

Editorial

PET images of an 81 year old man with stage IV Merkel cell carcinoma before (2/24/17) and after (6/28/17 and 8/29/17) pembrolizumab therapy. Metastases are seen in the right axilla, bilateral mediastinum, left lung, liver, retroperitoneal nodes, skeleton (SUV 4.7 to 13.6, left). Overall continued decrease in visceral and skeletal metastatic disease burden with complete metabolic response of metastatic osseous disease at C1. The new focal uptake in sigmoid diverticulum on 8/28/17 is consistent with inflammatory changes from sigmoid diverticulitis.

Merkel cell carcinoma shows similar aggressiveness as small cell lung cancer. Although chemotherapy with carboplatin and etoposide is often effective (60% response rate), it is often short-lived and not well tolerated in the elderly [1]. Avelumab has recently been approved by the US FDA for stage IV Merkel cell carcinoma. The overall response rate was 33% among the 88 patients treated after one line of chemotherapy (median follow up 10.4 months) [2]. Pembrolizumab given to 26 treatment-naïve patients in another phase 2 trial had an overall response rate of 56% with 4 complete responses [3]. Median follow up was 33 weeks (7-53 weeks). The presence or absence of Merkel cell polyomavirus did not affect the response rate.

References

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*Correspondence:

Germame Ajebo, Department of Internal Medicine, Georgia Cancer Center, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta University, USA,
E-mail: GAJEBO@augusta.edu

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