

Low-dose thalidomide plus dexamethasone is an effective salvage therapy for advanced myeloma

Antonio Palumbo, Luisa Giaccone, Alessandra Bertola, Patrizia Pregno, Sara Bringhen, Cecilia Rus, Sabrina Triolo, Eugenio Gallo, Alessandro Pileri, Mario Boccadoro

Correspondence: Mario Boccadoro, M.D., Divisione di Ematologia dell'Università di Torino, Azienda Ospedaliera S. Giovanni Battista, Via Genova 3, 10126 Torino, Italy. Phone: international + 39-011-6635814 - Fax: international +39-011-6963737 - E-mail: mario.boccadoro@unito.it

Background and Objectives.

The immunomodulatory drug thalidomide can inhibit angiogenesis and induce apoptosis in experimental models. It can also induce marked and durable response in advanced myeloma patients. Thalidomide has been used at doses ranging from 200 to 800 mg with significant toxicity. No data are available on the impact of low-dose thalidomide plus dexamethasone as salvage therapy for relapsed patients.

Design and Methods.

To address this issue, myeloma patients were treated with 100 mg/day thalidomide continuously and dexamethasone 40 mg, days 1-4, every month. Between June 1999 and August 2000, 77 patients (median age 65 years) who had relapsed or were refractory to chemotherapy were treated with thalidomide plus dexamethasone.

Results.

After a minimum of 3 months of treatment, 14 patients (18%) showed a myeloma protein reduction of 75%-100%, 18 patients (23%) showed a response of 50-75%, 19 patients (25%) a response of 25-50% and 26 patients (34%) a response of <25% or disease progression. After a median follow-up of 8 months, median progression-free survival was 12 months. Thalidomide was well tolerated. Constipation (12%) and sedation (6%) were mild. Tingling or numbness were present in 17% of patients, discontinuation of treatment was required in 10% of patients.

Interpretation and Conclusions.

The association of low-dose thalidomide plus dexamethasone is active against advanced myeloma. A significant proportion of patients benefit from this treatment as a salvage therapy postponing the delivery of chemotherapy.

©2001, Ferrata Storti Foundation

Key words: myeloma, thalidomide, dexamethasone, salvage therapy