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BARCELONA — The risk of reactivation of herpesvirus infection is increased among patients with rheumatoid arthritis who are treated with the anti-tumor necrosis factor agents, and especially with the monoclonal antibodies adalimumab, etanercept, and infliximab, Dr. Jatoi reported.

“Among the patients enrolled in the registry as of June 2006, 1,132 had received etanercept, 563 infliximab, and 1,155 adalimumab.

“Tetracycline Eases Cancer Therapy Rash

“Rashes were assessed by physicians and patients over an 8 week period. Physicians submitted weekly reports, including the answers to a brief questionnaire on rash incidence (the Skindex-16), and an EGFR inhibitor compliance questionnaire.

“Tetracycline may reduce the severity of rashes associated with epidermal growth factor receptor inhibitors, such as gefitinib and cetuximab, but the antibiotic doesn’t seem to prevent such rashes.

“Patents are getting a severe rash and it bothers them. Yet at the same time they’re saying, ‘My tumor may well be responding to this drug.’” Dr. Jatoi said.

“Tetracycline did not prevent EGFR inhibitor-induced rashes. However, diminished rash severity and improved quality of life in these patients deserves further study,” Dr. Jatoi said at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

“In terms of physician-reported rash severity, significantly fewer patients (17%) on tetracycline had rashes with grade 2 or greater at 4 weeks, compared with those on placebo (35%). However, the difference was not significant at 8 weeks—27% in the tetracycline group vs. 47% in the placebo group. Patient-reported results were similar.

“Patients on tetracycline did report less itching on the Skindex-16 starting at week 2, however.

“Three patients in each arm stopped taking EGFR inhibitors early because of cancer-related issues. Adverse events were comparable in both treatment arms.

“We invite caution, however, in interpreting these results for two reasons. First, this was a secondary end point not a primary end point. Secondly, the numbers are very small. Dropout rates were quite high over time,” Dr. Jatoi said.

“The issue of EGFR inhibitor-induced rash is particularly troublesome for patients, because it has been suggested that the presence of skin rash may be associated with tumor response.”

“Patients are sometimes finding themselves in quandary. They’re getting a severe rash and it bothers them. Yet at the same time they’re saying, ‘My tumor may well be responding to this drug. I can’t stop taking this drug and yet I want to,’” Dr. Jatoi said.