5-FU Cream Underused In Basal Cell Carcinoma

BY BRUCE JANCIN

KOCOA, HAWAII — Topical 5% 5-fluorouracil cream is a highly effective yet underutilized treatment option for superficial basal cell carcinomas, Dr. Leon H. Kircik said at the annual Hawaii dermatology seminar sponsored by Skin Disease Education Foundation.

It makes particularly strong sense in two patient subgroups in which surgery is not a good option: the frail elderly, and young appearance-oriented patients likely to go ballistic at the sight of the keloidal hypertrophic scar that so often occurs following excision of a skin cancer on the chest, shoulders, or upper back, said Dr. Kircik, a dermatologist in private practice in Louisville.

Topical 5% 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) cream earned Food and Drug Administration approval for treatment of basal cell carcinoma (BCC) more than 3 decades ago at the same time it received an indication for actinic keratosis. The pivotal clinical trial demonstrated a 93% histologic cure rate in 113 biopsy-proven superficial basal cell carcinomas.

Dr. Kircik recently conducted a confirmatory trial of his own. It involved 29 patients with 31 biopsy-proven BCCs treated with topical 5%-5-FU b.i.d. for up to 12 weeks. Patients were followed via office visits at 3-week intervals.

Histologic cure was documented in 90% of the lesions. The average time to cure was 10.5 weeks. Four BCCs were cured by week 6, 5 by week 9, and 19 by week 12. At each office visit, most patients reported no pain at all; the rest characterized the pain as mild. Dr. Kircik, a dermatologist in private practice in Louisville

The staging system is based on the diameter of the tumor, as is done in melanoma.