



spotlight on health

Protecting Against Serious Chemotherapy Side Effect

(NAPSA)—Every year, approximately 1.3 million cancer patients in the United States receive chemotherapy, the use of drugs that destroy cancer cells. Chemotherapy works by seeking out and attacking fast growing cells. As a result, healthy cells, including developing blood cells, are also killed, which can cause significant unwanted side effects for patients. What many patients don't know is that they can protect themselves from neutropenia, one of the most serious side effects of chemotherapy.

Neutropenia is a shortage of infection-fighting white blood cells. Febrile neutropenia (low white blood cell count with fever) is one of the most common symptoms of infection in patients receiving strong chemotherapy. Complications associated with a low white blood cell count can delay a patient's chemotherapy or keep them from getting a full dose of chemotherapy. Such delays and dose reductions can make chemotherapy less effective.

"With sufficient white blood cells, patients have a better chance of adhering to their chemotherapy schedule and maintaining their full dose, which gives them the best opportunity for a successful treatment," said Dr. Michael Rader, Clinical Asst. Prof. of medicine at Columbia University College of

Physicians and Surgeons. "Being proactive by using medication that increases white blood cell count from the start of chemotherapy can help protect patients from neutropenia."

For instance, Neulasta® (pegfilgrastim), a medication that increases white blood cell count, administered from the first cycle of chemotherapy treatment, helps protect patients against chemotherapy-related complications and significantly reduces the risk of infection and incidence of hospitalization related to febrile neutropenia. Previously, patients undergoing chemotherapy did not receive white blood cell boosters until later in their chemotherapy treatment. Prescribing information recommends that Neulasta be administered at least 24 hours after each chemotherapy dose.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved an update to the Neulasta prescribing information that will help oncologists protect more cancer patients from chemotherapy-related infections. The approval is based on a landmark study that demonstrated that administering the white blood cell booster in the first and subsequent cycles of strong chemotherapy reduced the incidence of febrile neutropenia by 94 percent compared to placebo (17% to 1%).

Rare cases of splenic rupture

Symptoms of neutropenia include:

- Fever greater than 100.4° F
- Chills/sweating
- Sore throat or cough
- Mouth ulcers
- Diarrhea or burning sensation during urination
- Redness, pain or swelling around a wound or sore

People at risk for neutropenia are those who:

- Are receiving strong or myelosuppressive-chemotherapy
- Have already had a low white blood cell count
- Have had previous chemotherapy or radiation treatment
- Are 70 and older
- Have other medical conditions, such as diabetes or lung disease
- Have open wounds or already active tissue infection
- Have advanced cancer



and allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, have been reported in postmarketing experience. Rarely, these allergic reactions recurred within days after discontinuing anti-allergic treatment. For more information, visit www.neulasta.com or speak to your healthcare professional.