Understanding chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL)

What is CLL?

Leukaemia is a type of cancer found in the blood and bone marrow and is caused by the rapid production of abnormal white blood cells. When CLL cells are found mostly in the lymph nodes, they are called small lymphocytic lymphoma (SLL) cells. The majority of CLL patients have multiple comorbid health conditions, though disease progression and complications are the primary causes of death.

Common symptoms*

Generally, CLL symptoms develop over time. As the disease progresses, some of the symptoms a person may experience include:

- Night sweats
- Low grade fever
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Weakness and fatigue
- Infections (skin, lungs, kidneys or other sites)
- Stomach pain
- Weight loss

* Symptoms are non-specific and could arise from other less serious conditions

Disease burden

CLL is the most common type of leukaemia in adults, with an estimated 105,000 new cases globally in 2016, and the number of people living with CLL is expected to grow with improved treatment as patients live longer with the disease. Men are more likely to have CLL than women. The average age at time of diagnosis is approximately 70 years. Many patients do not have any symptoms upon diagnosis. CLL is often found in blood tests for unrelated health problems or during a routine check-up.

CLL is not “one-size fits all”

In recent years, there has been a great deal of progress made in understanding CLL and how to best treat it. Certain genetic markers can point to which treatments may be most effective, which is why predictive testing is important before you start treatment. An accurate diagnosis of CLL is essential and can help your doctor or oncologist to decide the next steps. In addition to diagnostic tests, your doctor will take into account your medical history, physical health, stage of disease, genetic markers, biomarkers, and other factors to help your doctor better understand your CLL and the potential outcomes for treatment.

References

18. Z4-27235 Prepared: November 2020