assessed in NSCLC, often sequentially, which strains tissue availability.”

John Carpten, PhD, who heads the Institute of Translational Genomics at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, agreed. “We’ve now seen that noninvasive approaches are feasible,” he said, “not only to detect and monitor cancer, but also to tailor its clinical management.”

The field of circulating biomarkers is one that’s growing rapidly, Carpten added, with “new methods with which we can characterize exomes, for instance, or measure epigenetic changes in cfDNA. Integrating these different tools should allow us to do a much better job in precision oncology.” – Alissa Poh

**Combo Drug Strategy Tested for PDAC**

Dual inhibition of the cell’s recycling process and the KRAS-mediated MAPK cascade—along with a second agent that acts on a backup source of energy—led clinicians to evaluate the potential of drugs targeted at autophagy, the cell’s own recycling system. Adding an autophagy inhibitor, such as chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine, to the mix choked off this adaptive response.

The discovery that PDAC is typically refractory to standard therapies and can block the MAPK pathway in various different pancreatic cancer cell lines, “prompted us to test the oxaliplatin plus cetuximab for PDAC,” he said, “but it resulted in cell death.”

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**News in Brief**

**Norman E. “Ned” Sharpless, MD, became acting commissioner of the FDA in April, replacing Scott Gottlieb, MD, who resigned. Sharpless had served as the NCI’s director since October 2017. Deputy NCI Director Doug Lowy, MD, will become the NCI’s acting director. Gottlieb was confirmed as head of the FDA in May 2017.**

The FDA granted accelerated approval to atezolizumab (Tecentriq Genentech) in combination with nab-paclitaxel (Abraxane Celgene) for patients with inoperable advanced or metastatic triple-negative breast cancer whose tumors express PD-L1. In a phase III trial, the combination extended median overall survival by 2.6 months compared with a placebo plus nab-paclitaxel. A PD-L1 inhibitor, atezolizumab is the first immunotherapy approved for breast cancer.

Researchers developed an ALK-targeted antibody–drug conjugate for neuroblastoma (Science Transl Med 2019;11 eaau9732). The drug, CDX-0125-TEI, combines a monoclonal antibody that recognizes ALK-expressing cells with the alkylating chemotherapy agent thiеноindole. In laboratory experiments, it eliminated neuroblastoma cells in mouse models and cell cultures without damaging healthy cells.

The FDA granted breakthrough designation to an artificial intelligence (AI) tool designed by Paige.AI, the first such technology to receive the designation for cancer diagnosis. Launched last year, the company is training its deep-learning AI tool on digitized cancer pathology slides—to date, the company has more than 1 million slides, with another 4 million to be added across cancer subtypes.

Medicaid coverage of lung cancer screening for high-risk individuals varies widely by state, according to an American Lung Association report (available at https://www.lung.org). The report notes that 31 states cover screening through Medicaid and 12 states do not; seven others do not have publicly available policies. In total, 26.3% of those on Medicaid are current smokers, a key risk factor for developing lung cancer.
CANCER DISCOVERY

Noted

Cancer Discov 2019;9:571.

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