NCCN Guidelines® Insights
Head and Neck Cancers, Version 2.2017
Featured Updates to the NCCN Guidelines

David Adelstein, MD; Maura L. Gillison, MD, PhD; David G. Pfister, MD; Sharon Spencer, MD; Douglas Adkins, MD; David M. Brizel, MD; Barbara Burtness, MD; Paul M. Busse, MD, PhD; Jimmy J. Caudell, MD, PhD; Anthony J. Cmelak, MD; A. Dimitrios Colevas, MD; David W. Eisele, MD; Moon Fenton, MD; Robert L. Foote, MD; Robert S. Weber, MD; Wesley L. Hicks Jr, MD; Ying J. Hitchcock, MD; Antonio Jimeno, MD, PhD; Debra Leizman, MD; William M. Lydiatt, MD; Ellie Maghami, MD; Loren K. Mell, MD; Bharat B. Mittal, MD; Harlan A. Pinto, MD; John A. Ridge, MD, PhD; James Rocco, MD, PhD; Cristina P. Rodriguez, MD; Jatin P. Shah, MD; Maura L. Gillison, MD, PhD; Jennifer L. Burns; Randal S. Weber, MD; William M. Lydiatt, MD; Ellie Maghami, MD; Loren K. Mell, MD; Bharat B. Mittal, MD; Harlan A. Pinto, MD; John A. Ridge, MD, PhD; James Rocco, MD, PhD; Cristina P. Rodriguez, MD; Jatin P. Shah, MD; Maura L. Gillison, MD, PhD; Jennifer L. Burns; and Susan D. Darlow, PhD.

Abstract
The NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) for Head and Neck Cancers provide treatment recommendations for cancers of the lip, oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, ethmoid and maxillary sinuses, and salivary glands. Recommendations are also provided for occult primary of the head and neck (H&N), and separate algorithms have been developed by the panel for very advanced H&N cancers. These NCCN Guidelines Insights summarize the panel’s discussion and most recent recommendations regarding the increase in human papillomavirus–associated oropharyngeal cancer and the availability of immunotherapy agents for treatment of patients with recurrent or metastatic H&N cancer.


Please Note
The NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) are a statement of consensus of the authors regarding their views of currently accepted approaches to treatment. The NCCN Guidelines® Insights highlight important changes to the NCCN Guidelines® recommendations from previous versions. Colored markings in the algorithm show changes and the discussion aims to further the understanding of these changes by summarizing salient portions of the NCCN Guide Panel discussion, including the literature reviewed.

These NCCN Guidelines Insights do not represent the full NCCN Guidelines; further, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN®) makes no representation or warranties of any kind regarding the content, use, or application of the NCCN Guidelines and NCCN Guidelines Insights and disclaims any responsibility for their applications or use in any way.

The full and most current version of these NCCN Guidelines are available at NCCN.org.

© National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. 2017, All rights reserved. The NCCN Guidelines and the illustrations herein may not be reproduced in any form without the express written permission of NCCN.
NCCN: Continuing Education

Target Audience: This activity is designed to meet the educational needs of physicians, nurses, and pharmacists involved in the management of patients with cancer.

Accreditation Statement

Physicians: National Comprehensive Cancer Network is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

NCCN designates this journal-based CE activity for a maximum of 1.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Nurses: National Comprehensive Cancer Network is accredited as a provider of continuing nursing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Commission on Accreditation.

NCCN designates this educational activity for a maximum of 1.0 contact hour.

Pharmacists: National Comprehensive Cancer Network is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education as a provider of continuing pharmacy education.

Disclosure of Relevant Financial Relationships

Editor:
Kerrin M. Green, MA, Assistant Managing Editor, JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

JNCCN:
Kimberly Callan, MS, Senior Director, Professional and Patient Publications, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Genevieve Emberger Hartzman, MA, Journal Production Specialist, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

CE Authors:
Deborah J. Moonan, RN, BSN, Director, Continuing Education, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships. (Employed by NCCN until 2/17/17.)

Karen Kanefield, Manager, Continuing Education Accreditation and Program Operations, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Kathy Smith, Manager, CE Grant Writing & Project Management, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Kristina M. Gregory, RN, MSN, OCN, Vice President, Clinical Information Operations, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Rashmi Kumar, PhD, Director, Clinical Information Operations, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Individuals Who Provided Content Development and/or Authorship Assistance:

David Adkins, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

Douglas Adkins, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has received grant/research support from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Merck & Co., Inc., and Kyowa Hakko Kirin Co., Ltd.; and he received consulting fees/honoraria from Amgen Inc., Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP; Merck & Co., Inc., Celgene Corporation, and Eli Lilly and Company.

Kristina M. Gregory, RN, MSN, OCN, has disclosed that she has served as a scientific advisor for Eli Lilly and Company; received royalty income from Springer and UpToDate; and received grant/research support from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Bayer HealthCare, Eli Lilly and Company, Exelixis Inc., Genentech, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, MedImmune Inc., Merck & Co., Inc., and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation.

Sue S. Yom, MD, PhD, Panel Chair, has disclosed that she has received consulting fees/honoraria from Amgen Inc., Debiopharm International S.A., Celgene Corporation, and AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP; and served as a scientific advisor for Boehringer Ingelheim GmbH, and that he has received grant/research support from AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Bayer HealthCare, Eli Lilly and Company, Exelixis Inc., Genentech, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, MedImmune Inc., Merck & Co., Inc., and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation.

Anastasia Taliani, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has served as a scientific advisor for Boehringer Ingelheim GmbH; and that he has received consulting fees/honoraria from AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Bayer HealthCare, Eli Lilly and Company, Exelixis Inc., Genentech, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, MedImmune Inc., Merck & Co., Inc., and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation.

Barbara Burtness, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that she has received grant/research support from Advaxis, Inc., Merck & Co., Inc., and Bristol-Myers Squibb Company; received consulting fees/honoraria from Amgen Inc., Debiopharm International S.A., Celgene Corporation, and AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP; and served as a scientific advisor for Boehringer Ingelheim GmbH, MedImmune Inc., and VentiRx Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

A. Dimitrios Colevas, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he received consulting fees/honoraria and other financial benefit from Pfizer Inc., and that he received grant/research support from AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Innate Pharma S.A., IRX Therapeutics, Inc., and Threshold Pharmaceuticals.

Robert L. Foote, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he received royalty income from Bionix, Elsevier, and UpToDate.

Robert I. Haddad, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he received grant/research support from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Merck & Co., Inc., AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, and Celgene Corporation; and that he received consulting fees/honoraria from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Merck & Co., Inc., AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Pfizer Inc., Celgene Corporation, and Eisai Inc.

Antonio Jimeno, MD, PhD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has served as a scientific advisor for AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP.

William M. Lydiatt, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

Bharat B. Mittal, MD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

John A. Ridge, MD, PhD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

John A. Ridge, MD, PhD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

John A. Ridge, MD, PhD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

John A. Ridge, MD, PhD, Panel Member, has disclosed that he has no relevant financial relationships.

Jennifer L. Burns, Guidelines Coordinator, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

Susan D. Darlow, PhD, Oncology Scientist/Medical Writer, NCCN, has disclosed that she has no relevant financial relationships.

This activity is supported by educational grants from Astellas, AstraZeneca, Cellnex Therapeutics, Clovis Oncology, Genomic Health, Inc., Kyowa Hakko Kirin, Jazz Pharmaceuticals, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, and NOVOCURE. This activity is supported by an independent educational grant from Merck Co., Inc.
Head and Neck Cancers, Version 2.2017

Base of tongue/tonsil/posterior pharyngeal wall/soft palate

WORKUP

• H&P\textsuperscript{a,b} including a complete head and neck exam; mirror and fiberoptic examination as clinically indicated
• Biopsy of primary site or fine-needle aspiration (FNA) of the neck
• Tumor human papillomavirus (HPV) testing recommended\textsuperscript{c}
• Chest CT\textsuperscript{d} (with or without contrast) as clinically indicated
• CT with contrast and/or MRI with contrast of primary and neck
• Consider FDG-PET/CT for stage III-IV disease
• Dental evaluation,\textsuperscript{e} including panorex as clinically indicated
• Nutrition, speech and swallowing evaluation/therapy, and audiogram as clinically indicated\textsuperscript{f}
• EUA with endoscopy as clinically indicated
• Pre-anesthesia studies
• Multidisciplinary consultation as clinically indicated

CLINICAL STAGING

T1-2, N0-1 → See Treatment of Primary and Neck (ORPH-2)

T3-4a, N0-1 → See Treatment of Primary and Neck (ORPH-3)

Any T, N2-3 → See Treatment of Primary and Neck (ORPH-4)

T4b, any N, or Unresectable nodal disease or Unfit for surgery → See Treatment of Very Advanced Head and Neck Cancer (ADV-1)

Metastatic (M1) disease at initial presentation → See Treatment of Very Advanced Head and Neck Cancer (ADV-2)

\textsuperscript{a}H&P should include documentation and quantification (pack years smoked) of tobacco use history. Smoking cessation counseling as clinically indicated. All current smokers should be advised to quit smoking, and former smokers should be advised to remain abstinent from smoking. For additional cessation support and resources, smokers can be referred to the NCCN Guidelines for Smoking Cessation and www.smokefree.gov.

\textsuperscript{b}Screen for depression (See NCCN Guidelines for Distress Management).

\textsuperscript{c}P16 expression is highly correlated with HPV status and is widely available. HPV in situ hybridization or PCR-based assay is also available. Although not used to guide treatment, HPV testing is valuable prognostically. The results of HPV testing should not change management decisions except in the context of a clinical trial.

\textsuperscript{d}Chest CT is recommended for advanced nodal disease to screen for distant metastases, and for select patients who smoke to screen for lung cancer. See NCCN Guidelines for Lung Cancer Screening.

\textsuperscript{e}See Principles of Dental Evaluation and Management (DENT-A).

\textsuperscript{f}See Principles of Nutrition: Management and Supportive Care (NUTR-A).

NCCN Categories of Evidence and Consensus

**Category 1:** Based upon high-level evidence, there is uniform NCCN consensus that the intervention is appropriate.

**Category 2A:** Based upon lower-level evidence, there is uniform NCCN consensus that the intervention is appropriate.

**Category 2B:** Based upon lower-level evidence, there is NCCN consensus that the intervention is appropriate.

**Category 3:** Based upon any level of evidence, there is major NCCN disagreement that the intervention is appropriate.

All recommendations are category 2A unless otherwise noted.

Clinical trials: NCCN believes that the best management for any cancer patient is in a clinical trial. Participation in clinical trials is especially encouraged.

Overview

Treatment is complex for patients with head and neck (H&N) cancers. The specific site of disease, stage, and pathologic findings guide treatment (eg, the appropriate surgical procedure, radiation targets, dose and fractionation, indications for systemic therapy). Single-modality treatment with surgery or radiation therapy (RT) is generally recommended for the approximately 30% to 40% of patients who present with early-stage disease (stage I or II). The 2 most commonly used modalities, surgery and RT, result in similar survival in these individuals. The choice of surgery or RT is often based on local institutional expertise and/or perceived relative morbidity of these treatment options. With evolving techniques of systemic therapy/RT and less invasive surgery, morbidity is also a moving target. Combined modality therapy is generally recommended for the approximately 60% of patients with locally or regionally advanced disease at diagnosis. Participation in clinical trials is a preferred or recommended...
Base of tongue/tonsil/posterior pharyngeal wall/soft palate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLINICAL STAGING</th>
<th>TREATMENT OF PRIMARY AND NECK</th>
<th>ADJUVANT TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1-2, N0-1</td>
<td>Definitive RT\textsuperscript{g} or Transoral or open resection of primary ± ipsilateral or bilateral neck dissection\textsuperscript{h}</td>
<td>Recurrent or Persistent Disease (See ADV-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No adverse features\textsuperscript{i}</td>
<td>Systemic therapy/RT\textsuperscript{g,j,k}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extracapsular spread ± positive margin</td>
<td>Follow-up (See FOLL-A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive margin</td>
<td>Recurrent or Persistent Disease (See ADV-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other risk features</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RT\textsuperscript{g}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consider systemic therapy/RT\textsuperscript{g,j}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For T2, N1 only, RT\textsuperscript{g} + systemic therapy\textsuperscript{j} (category 2B for systemic therapy)</td>
<td>See Follow-Up Recommendations Post Chemoradiation or RT (FOLL-A, 2 of 2)</td>
<td>Recurrent or Persistent Disease (See ADV-3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{g}See Principles of Radiation Therapy (ORPH-A).
\textsuperscript{h}See Principles of Surgery (SURG-A).
\textsuperscript{i}See Principles of Systemic Therapy (CHEM-A).
\textsuperscript{j}Adverse features: extracapsular nodal spread, positive margins, pT3 or pT4 primary, N2 or N3 nodal disease, nodal disease in levels IV or V, perineural invasion, vascular embolism (lymphovascular invasion) (See Discussion).
\textsuperscript{k}The recommendations for patients at high risk with extracapsular spread + positive margins are based on randomized studies involving patients for whom the HPV status of their tumors was not specified.
\textsuperscript{l}Consider re-resection to achieve negative margins, if feasible.

Revisions to the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) for H&N Cancers in recent years have taken into account the increase in human papillomavirus (HPV)–associated oropharyngeal cancer, as well as the recent availability of immunotherapy agents for patients with recurrent or metastatic disease.

### HPV and H&N Cancer

HPV infection is associated with an estimated 4.8% of global cancers.\textsuperscript{3} HPV is now well accepted as a cause of squamous cancers of the oropharynx (particularly cancers of the tonsils and tongue base).\textsuperscript{4–11} The overall incidence of HPV-positive H&N cancers is increasing in the United States, whereas the incidence of HPV-negative (primarily tobacco- and alcohol-caused) cancer is decreasing.\textsuperscript{12} Patients with HPV-associated H&N cancer tend to be younger.\textsuperscript{11,13} The HPV-attributable fraction in newly diagnosed oropharyngeal cancer is estimated at 60% to 70% in the United States and parts of the European Union.\textsuperscript{12,14–17} Oral HPV type 16 (HPV16) infection increases the risk of oropharyngeal cancer\textsuperscript{4,10,18,19} and a strong causal relationship has been established\textsuperscript{4,18}; HPV types 18, 31, and 33 are responsible for the vast majority of the remaining fraction.\textsuperscript{11} Expression of HPV E6 and E7 oncogenes inactivates the tumor-suppressor proteins p53 and pRb, respectively, which leads to the development of cancer.\textsuperscript{20} Prophylactic HPV vaccination strongly decreased the incidence of cervical intraepithelial neoplasia in prospective clinical trials.\textsuperscript{21,22} Recent data from one of these trials suggest that HPV vaccination has the potential to prevent HPV-attributed oropharyngeal cancer.\textsuperscript{23} An unplanned analysis demonstrated a statistically significantly lower prevalence of oral HPV 16/18 infection 4 years after vaccination among HPV-vaccinated versus hepatitis A–
Head and Neck Cancers, Version 2.2017

**PRINCIPLES OF SYSTEMIC THERAPY**

- The choice of systemic therapy should be individualized based on patient characteristics (PS, goals of therapy).
- Unless otherwise specified, regimens listed below can be used for either nasopharyngeal or non-nasopharyngeal cancer.

**Recurrent, Unresectable, or Metastatic**

(with no surgery or RT option)

- Combination therapy
  - Cisplatin or carboplatin/5-FU/cetuximab (non-nasopharyngeal) (category 1)
  - Cisplatin or carboplatin/docetaxel or paclitaxel (non-nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin/5-FU (non-nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin or carboplatin/docetaxel/cetuximab (non-nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin or carboplatin/paclitaxel/cetuximab (non-nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin/gemcitabine (nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin/cetuximab (nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin/5-FU (nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin or carboplatin/docetaxel/cetuximab (nasopharyngeal)
  - Cisplatin/gemcitabine (nasopharyngeal)
  - Gemcitabine/vinorelbine (nasopharyngeal)

- Single agents
  - Cisplatin
  - Carboplatin
  - Paclitaxel
  - Docetaxel
  - 5-FU
  - Methotrexate
  - Cetuximab (non-nasopharyngeal)
  - Gemcitabine (nasopharyngeal)
  - Capecitabine
  - Afatinib (non-nasopharyngeal, if disease progression on or after platinum-containing chemotherapy) (category 2B)
  - Pembrolizumab (non-nasopharyngeal, if disease progression on or after platinum-containing chemotherapy)
  - Nivolumab (non-nasopharyngeal, if disease progression on or after platinum-containing chemotherapy) (category 1)

**HPV Testing**

The association of tumor HPV status with patient prognosis has led to clinical utility (discussed later). However, there are currently no diagnostic tests with regulatory approval. A few HPV testing options are available for use in the clinical setting. Expression of p16 as detected by immunohistochemistry (IHC) is a widely available surrogate biomarker that has very good agreement with HPV status as determined by HPV E6/E7 mRNA expression. Other tests include HPV detection through PCR and in situ hybridization (ISH). Sensitivity of IHC staining for p16 and PCR-based assay is high, although specificity is highest for ISH. A validation study of HPV testing methods showed that the sensitivity and specificity of p16 IHC was 96.8% and 83.8%, respectively, with the sensitivity and specificity of HPV16 ISH being 88.0% and 94.7%. Agreement between p16 IHC and ISH was good. The reduced specificity for p16 IHC may have been due to the presence of p16-positive tumors that do not have evidence of HPV DNA, whereas the reduced sensitivity for HPV16 ISH may been due to the presence of other high-risk HPV types in the tumor. Due to variations in sensitivity and specificity values of testing options, multiple methods may be used in combination for HPV detection. Sufficient pathologic material for HPV testing can be obtained through fine-needle aspiration.

**NCCN Recommendations:** For the 2016 update, the panel revised the footnote regarding HPV testing as part of the evaluation for oropharyngeal cancer to take into account that p16 IHC is widely available and highly correlated with HPV status (ORPH-1; page 763). The footnote was also revised to take into account the option of using either ISH- or PCR-based assay. Panel members note that HPV testing...
may prompt questions about prognosis (ie, a favorable or a less favorable forecast) and sexual history that the clinician should be prepared to address.

**HPV and Treatment of Oropharyngeal Cancer**

Analyses from clinical trials indicate that patients with locally advanced HPV-positive H&N cancers experience improved response to treatment and overall survival (OS) and progression-free survival (PFS) when compared with HPV-negative tumors. Some clinicians have recently suggested that less-intense treatment may be adequate for HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers (ie, deintensification); however, the available data supporting this assertion are limited by retrospective analyses, variability in HPV testing method used, and short follow-up periods. Deintensification treatment protocols for HPV-associated, locally advanced oropharyngeal cancer are being investigated in ongoing clinical trials. Strategies under active investigation include reducing or using response-stratified RT dose, using RT alone versus chemoradiation, using less invasive surgical procedures such as transoral robotic surgery, using sequential systemic therapy/RT, and using immunotherapy and targeted therapy agents such as cetuximab.

The ECOG-ACRIN phase II E1308 trial, in which patients with stage III–IV HPV16 and/or p16-positive oropharyngeal cancer (N=80) received induction chemotherapy followed by reduced-dose RT and weekly cetuximab, recently reported results showing that RT deintensification may result in equivalent or similar responses in selected patients compared with full-dose RT.

The relationship between HPV and other prognostic or predictive factors such as smoking history and stage has been investigated. For example, analyses of patients with oropharyngeal cancer who were enrolled in RTOG 9003 or 0129 (n=165) showed that smoking was associated with decreased OS and PFS, regardless of p16 status. A retrospective analysis from a clinical trial showed no difference in the presence of distant metastasis in patients with p16-positive disease compared with those with p16-negative disease. Additional analyses have suggested that individuals with matted nodes or N2c disease may have worse prognosis, and therefore should be excluded from deintensification trials.

HPV status should be used as a stratification factor or be addressed in separate trials (HPV-related vs -unrelated disease) for which patients with oropharyngeal cancer are eligible. Some clinicians have recently suggested that less-intense treatment may be adequate for HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers (ie, deintensification); however, the available data supporting this assertion are limited by retrospective analyses, variability in HPV testing method used, and short follow-up periods. Deintensification treatment protocols for HPV-associated, locally advanced oropharyngeal cancer are being investigated in ongoing clinical trials. Strategies under active investigation include reducing or using response-stratified RT dose, using RT alone versus chemoradiation, using less invasive surgical procedures such as transoral robotic surgery, using sequential systemic therapy/RT, and using immunotherapy and targeted therapy agents such as cetuximab.

The ECOG-ACRIN phase II E1308 trial, in which patients with stage III–IV HPV16 and/or p16-positive oropharyngeal cancer (N=80) received induction chemotherapy followed by reduced-dose RT and weekly cetuximab, recently reported results showing that RT deintensification may result in equivalent or similar responses in selected patients compared with full-dose RT.

The relationship between HPV and other prognostic or predictive factors such as smoking history and stage has been investigated. For example, analyses of patients with oropharyngeal cancer who were enrolled in RTOG 9003 or 0129 (n=165) showed that smoking was associated with decreased OS and PFS, regardless of p16 status. A retrospective analysis from a clinical trial showed no difference in the presence of distant metastasis in patients with p16-positive disease compared with those with p16-negative disease. Additional analyses have suggested that individuals with matted nodes or N2c disease may have worse prognosis, and therefore should be excluded from deintensification trials.

The panel currently recommends adjuvant systemic therapy/RT in patients with squamous cell carcinoma of the oropharynx in the presence of the adverse pathologic features of extracapsular nodal spread with (or without) positive mucosal margins. This recommendation is primarily based on results from RTOG 9501 and EORTC 22931. However, in a review of published data from these randomized trials.

© JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network | Volume 15 Number 6 | June 2017
Head and Neck Cancers, Version 2.2017

controlled trials, it was noted that the panel’s recommendations are based on studies that did not investigate the impact of HPV or p16 status. However, the investigators from RTOG 9501 and EORTC 22931 point out that the prevalence of HPV-positive/p16-positive tumors was likely to be low in these trials. Other limitations noted in this review included unplanned subgroup analyses, the grouping of multiple H&N subsites, inconsistent quantitative reporting, and lack of reporting on tumor and lymph node classification, treatment effect sizes, multivariable analyses, and quality-of-life outcomes. Therefore, the investigators who performed this review argued that these trials lack the generalizability necessary to rationalize the use of adjuvant systemic therapy/RT in patients with p16-positive disease.

Recent retrospective studies have not observed a statistically significant association between extracapsular spread and survival in patients with HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer. For example, a study of 220 patients with p16-positive oropharyngeal cancer who received surgical resection with or without adjuvant treatment showed that the presence of ≥5 metastatic nodes is associated with disease recurrence and survival, but extracapsular spread was not significantly associated with outcomes in this sample. Recent studies of patients with p16-positive oropharyngeal cancer treated with surgery show that soft tissue metastasis may be associated with poor survival outcomes, especially in patients with T3–T4 disease. These results suggest that patients with p16-positive disease with extracapular spread could potentially be treated differently than those with p16-negative disease and extracapsular spread.

NCCN Recommendations: The panel deliberated regarding the strength and limitations of the evidence supporting the use of adjuvant systemic therapy/RT in patients with oropharyngeal cancer who have extracapsular spread. Before the 2016 update, adjuvant systemic therapy/RT for patients with extracapsular spread was a category 1 recommendation for cancer of the oropharynx, lip, oral cavity, hypopharynx, larynx, and unknown primary. For the 2016 update, the panel revised its recommendation for adjuvant systemic therapy/RT in patients with oropharyngeal cancer who have extracapsular spread from category 1 to category 2A (see ORPH-2; page 764; revisions also apply to ORPH-3 and ORPH-4). This change in category was based on a lack of high-quality, prospective clinical evidence and controversy. Adjuvant systemic therapy/RT remains a category 1 recommendation for patients with other types of H&N cancer who have extracapsular spread, including HPV-negative oropharynx cancer. Where the panel recommends adjuvant systemic therapy/RT for patients with oropharyngeal cancer and extracapsular spread, a footnote was added noting that this treatment recommendation is based on randomized studies in which HPV status was unknown, consistent with a conclusion of the review by Sinha et al.

Because HPV status is a strong predictor of oropharyngeal cancer prognosis, the AJCC recently released separate staging systems for p16-positive and p16-negative oropharyngeal cancer. However, as the panel meeting to discuss the 2017 NCCN Guidelines update was held before publication of the newest edition of the AJCC Staging Manual, the most recent version of the NCCN Guidelines for Cancer of the Oropharynx does not take into account differential staging between p16-positive and p16-negative disease. Deintensification treatment protocols for patients with HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer are currently being investigated (eg, ClinicalTrials.gov identifiers: NCT01154920, NCT01706939, NCT01302834, and NCT01855451). Panel members urge that patients with HPV-related cancers be enrolled in clinical trials evaluating biological and treatment-related questions.

Immunotherapy for Recurrent and Metastatic H&N Cancer

Updates to systemic therapy recommendations made in 2016 include the addition of 2 immunotherapy agents: nivolumab and pembrolizumab (see CHEM-A 2 of 5; page 765). Nivolumab, an anti–PD-1 antibody, was assessed in a phase III randomized clinical trial including 361 patients with recurrent H&N squamous cell cancer whose disease had progressed within 6 months after platinum-based chemotherapy. With a median follow-up of 5.1 months (range, 0–16.8 months), OS was significantly greater in patients randomized to receive nivolumab versus standard second-line, single-agent systemic therapy with either methotrexate, docetaxel, or cetuximab (HR, 0.70; 97.73% CI, 0.51–0.96; P=.01). One-year survival was also greater for patients who received nivolumab versus standard therapy (36.0%
whereas pembrolizumab is a category 2A

70

69

71

59% and PFS was 23%, with an overall response rate of 18%. Observed responses appeared durable, although follow-up was limited (median, 9 months). Through scoring both tumor and immune cells, the clinical activity was identified and the possibility that responses could be durable was suggested. A lower, fixed-dose schedule using pembrolizumab, 200 mg every 3 weeks was subsequently assessed in a phase Ib expansion cohort of 132 patients with recurrent or metastatic squamous cell H&N cancer that has progressed after platinum-based chemotherapy compared with those who receive standard single-agent systemic therapy.

Pembrolizumab, another anti–PD-1 antibody, was initially studied at a dose of 10 mg/kg given every 2 weeks in the squamous cell H&N cancer cohort of the KEYNOTE-012 trial. Clinical activity was observed in patients with nivolumab compared with 5.1% of those who received standard therapy. These results indicate that nivolumab prolongs survival in patients with recurrent or metastatic squamous cell H&N cancer that has progressed after platinum-based chemotherapy compared with those who receive standard single-agent systemic therapy.

Pembrolizumab received FDA approval in 2016 for use in patients with recurrent or metastatic squamous cell H&N cancer that has progressed on or after platinum-based chemotherapy. The NCCN panel recommends pembrolizumab for patients with this indication as a category 1 recommendation based on high-quality evidence, whereas pembrolizumab is a category 2A recommendation based on results from nonrandomized trials. Despite the ambiguities of PD-L1 testing and definitions, PD-L1 expression may be associated with better outcomes from treatment with immunotherapy for recurrent or metastatic squamous cell H&N cancer (ie, greater likelihood of response to pembrolizumab and greater survival benefit in response to nivolumab).

Summary

The incidence of HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer is increasing in the United States, and patients with locally advanced HPV-positive H&N cancers have improved outcomes compared with those with HPV-negative tumors. However, currently there are insufficient data to recommend that patients with HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers receive less-intensive treatment relative to patients with HPV-negative cancers. HPV status is a prognostic factor, and panel members urge that patients with HPV-related cancers be enrolled in clinical trials evaluating biological and treatment-related questions. Evidence to support adjuvant systemic therapy/RT for patients with oropharyngeal cancer and extracapsular spread is based on randomized studies in which HPV status was unknown. Other recent updates to the NCCN Guidelines for H&N Cancers include the addition of the immunotherapy agents nivolumab and pembrolizumab for the treatment of patients with recurrent or metastatic H&N cancer who have progressed on or after platinum-based chemotherapy.

References

Head and Neck Cancers, Version 2.2017


36. Mehanna H. Update on de-intensification and intensification studies in HPV. Recent Results Cancer Res 2017;206:251–256.


41. Quan H, Fantus AE. Controversies in treatment deintensification of human papillomavirus-associated oropharyngeal carcinomas: should we, how should we, and for whom? J Clin Oncol 2013;31:520–522.


Posttest Questions

1. HPV testing options include the following:
   a. p16 IHC
   b. HPV16 ISH
   c. HPV testing by PCR-based assay
   d. All of the above

2. True or False: HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers generally have a worse prognosis when compared with HPV-negative oropharyngeal cancers.

3. For a patient with metastatic squamous cell carcinoma of the oral cavity which has progressed on cisplatin, which treatment option is recommended as a category 1 option in the NCCN Guidelines for Head and Neck Cancers?
   a. Nivolumab
   b. Pembrolizumab
   c. Cisplatin/gemcitabine
   d. Vinorelbine
   e. Cetuximab + concurrent RT