Rise in risk for skin cancer reported

People who have weakened immune systems, such as those who have transplanted organs or HIV infection, are at increased risk for cancer, including skin cancer.

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in North America, reports of one cancer affecting the skin (and later, other organs) became increasingly common. This cancer is called Kaposi’s sarcoma (KS). In 1996, when HAART became available in high-income countries, KS often regressed or went into remission as PHAs’ immune systems strengthened.

However, HAART cannot completely restore the immune system, even with prolonged use. And as PHAs age, their immune systems slowly degrade. Some researchers have noticed that PHAs may be at risk for other forms of cancer affecting the skin. To confirm these findings, researchers in San Diego conducted a study.

Study details

Researchers reviewed information collected in a database from 4,566 PHAs between the years 1987 and 2006. The study team focused on the following cancers:

- KS
- malignant melanoma (MM)
- basal cell carcinoma (BCC)
- squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)

Results

Researchers found that during the study period nearly 6% of PHAs developed a form of skin cancer. Nine PHAs developed more than one type of skin cancer as follows:

- Three PHAs developed KS after they had been diagnosed with another form of skin cancer.
- Four PHAs developed MM and two other PHAs developed SCC after first being diagnosed with a different skin cancer.

The good news is that most of the cancers (83%) occurred in the time before HAART was available and, in these cases, it was usually KS. After HAART became available, cases of skin cancer were usually diagnosed as BCC, SCC or MM.

Compared to the average HIV negative person in the United States, PHAs in this study were twice as likely to get BCC. Also, PHAs had a risk for MM that was three times greater. However, the risk of SCC was not statistically different from that of HIV negative people.

In general, PHAs with these types of skin cancer were likely to have this profile:

- 42 years old
- male
- white
- have had an AIDS-related illness

Due to these findings, the study team suggested that doctors consider screening some PHAs for skin cancer.

REFERENCE:
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