THE HINDU
Region

JIPMER sets up multi-centre clinical trial unit in oncology

The unit will assist Indian pharma conduct clinical trials with indigenously developed medicines. It is part of an initiative to set up collaborative cancer trial groups in different parts of the country

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PUDUCHERRY

In order to improve the outcome of treatment for cancer patients, the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER) in Puducherry has established a multi-centre clinical trial unit in oncology.

Funded by the Biotechnology Research Assistance and Development Council (BIRAC), under its flagship National Biopharma Mission Programme, the unit would assist Indian pharma conduct clinical trials with indigenously developed medicines.

In 2020, BIRAC came up with the initiative to fund a network of oncology hospitals (Network of Oncology Clinical Trials India, NOCI) for new medicines, surgical techniques, and radiation techniques for cancer treatment. It envisages setting up collaborative cancer trial groups in different parts of the country, the hospital said in a release.

A step forward: Focusing on research, the JIPMER unit will be among six centres in the network to carry out individual activities to create awareness about clinical trials. FILE PHOTO

Six centres

A sum of ₹9.6 crore was set aside to fund trials in six large oncology centres, including two in north India, three in south and one in the eastern part of the country. JIPMER had also made a request to BIRAC about establishing such a unit, the release said.

Focusing on research, the six centres in the network will carry out individual activities to create awareness about clinical trials, public interfaces, videos, and pamphlets.

The network website also hosts training videos on different types of cancer for research personnel. Details of the website can be found by logging on to https://noci-india.com/, the release said.

Low-cost medicine

"A recent trial conducted by the hospital on cancer patients with severe appetite loss showed the usefulness of a medicine costing around ₹2 per day. The research on the medicine has received global acceptance, and it has led to a change in the recommendations by the American Society of Clinical Oncology in the management of anorexia in patients receiving chemotherapy," the release said.

In 2020, BIRAC came up with the initiative to fund a network of oncology hospitals for cancer treatment

Evidence based studies

Collaborative clinical trials, involving hundred of patients across different institutions, are currently the cornerstone of creating an evidence base for studying cancer treatments. Many of these trials have been conducted in western countries in the last two to three decades. Very few high-quality cancer clinical trials are available from India, the release said.

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JIPMER trial finds affordable cure for appetite loss in cancer patients

DEBJANI DUTTA @ Puducherry

CANCER treatment continues to be painful and costly despite major advances in oncolgy. Patients undergoing chemotherapy often experience severe weight loss with lower food intake. A path-breaking trial conducted at the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER) offers an effective low-cost remedy to this issue. The trial found that an antipsychotic drug can combat severe appetite loss in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. With the resultant weight gain, treatment outcomes and quality of life could be enhanced.

This research, spearheaded by Principal Investigator Dr Prasanth Ganesan, Professor of Medical Oncology at JIPMER, found success with Olanzapine, primarily an antipsychotic drug, costing a mere ₹2 per day. Its efficacy, coupled with affordability, heralds a new chapter in managing appetite loss in cancer patients and could. According to JIPMER, this has garnered international recognition and prompted alterations in the recommendations set forth by the American Society of Clinical Oncology for managing anorexia in chemotherapy recipients.

Anorexia, a prevalent issue affecting 30% to 80% of individuals grappling with advanced malignancies, compromises the nutritional status of the patient and may indirectly worsen chemotherapy tolerance and thus survival.

The recent trial's focus on low-dose daily olanzapine, demonstrated promising outcomes, proving to be a simple, inexpensive, and well-tolerated intervention significantly improving appetite and promoting weight gain in newly diagnosed patients undergoing chemotherapy, said Dr Prasanth.

The trial commencing from the first day of chemotherapy and continuing for 12 weeks involved administering olanzapine alongside nutritional advice to patients with advanced lung, gastric, and hepatopancreatic biliary tract cancers.

A total of 150 patients were screened between November 2020 and June 2022, with 124 enrolled in the trial (63 in the olanzapine arm and 61 in the placebo arm). Of these, 58 in the olanzapine group and 54 in the placebo group were evaluated for the primary endpoint of weight gain at the 12-week mark.

The results revealed a significant disparity, with 60% (35 out of 58 patients) in the olanzapine group achieving over 5% weight gain, while only 9% (5 out of 54 patients) in the placebo group experienced similar outcomes. Additionally, the proportion of patients suffering from weight loss at the study's conclusion was notably lower among those treated with olanzapine (14% versus 59%).

At present, the drug is being used in JIPMER and several hospitals across the country in cancer patients, revealed Dr Prasanth.