Report

We were delighted to welcome over a 100 delegates yet again to our UK CLL Forum meeting which was held on 4th October at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

The day was primarily based around clinical updates with a fantastic headline talk from Rick Furman who came over from the Weill Cornell Medical College to update the UK on the stunning therapeutic advances in CLL practice with the novel inhibitors of the B-cell receptor pathway.

Chris Fegan (Cardiff) kicked off the day in his beloved style, summarising our current UK position on the management of relapsed CLL. Clearly this group presents a number of challenges, particularly relating to disease resistance and treatment-related toxicities. Andy Pettitt (Liverpool) outlined the science and therapeutic progress behind advances in treating the most difficult 17p deleted subgroup of patients. This led onto Adrian Bloor's (Manchester) talk on allogeneic transplant in CLL. This therapeutic intervention offers the potential of 'cure' for CLL patients, but is associated with significant risk, so Adrian's update on the direction of travel of transplant was very welcome.

Pete Hillmen (Leeds) and Mel Oates (Liverpool) finished the morning session talking about clinical trials and the UK CLL biobank respectively. It is an exciting time for clinical trials. We need to embrace the novel therapies as quickly as possible, and Pete is coordinating efforts to get these drugs into the UK for first line trials as well as trials at relapse. This task is not straightforward, as many parties are involved in the discussions, but as Pete reminded us, the UK has an excellent reputation in recruitment to CLL trials, and as a community, we feel we can continue to deliver on clinical trials in CLL. The vast majority of trial patients are agreeing for blood / marrow samples to be banked in the Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research sponsored UK CLL Biobank. This is an invaluable resource from very well characterised patients. The scope for research on these samples is very exciting.

We were delighted by the quality of science submissions for the Catovsky prize. This prize is awarded annually for the best UK unpublished work in the field of CLL. Twelve abstracts were selected, with 8 posters and 4 oral presentations. There was considerable interest in the posters with much discussion around the poster boards of projects and collaborations - I am delighted that the genomics poster from Rachel Bashford-Rogers (Sanger, Cambridge) has already precipitated collaboration plans with Anna Schuh (Oxford). The oral presentations were of a very high standard, and after much deliberation, the prize was awarded to Emilio Cosimo from Glasgow for his work on the CDK inhibitor CR8. This inihibitor of NF-kB signalling looks very exciting, and we are hopeful for translation into the clinical arena soon. Congratulations Emilio!

Monica Else (Institute of Cancer Research) presented her fascinating quality of life data from the long term follow-up of the CLL4 trial, and we were touched by the 'special' patient who accompanied her to the meeting to help deliver her talk. A real reminder to the clinicians in the audience of the impact that a disease such as CLL can have on a patient and their family. I finished off the list of UK speakers with a general talk outlining the longer term complication of living with CLL. I explored some of the difficult decisions we face with our patients, striking the balance between short and long term toxicity and efficacy.

The meeting was rounded off by our headline guest speaker from New York. It was a real pleasure to welcome Rick Furman to our meeting. We had the opportunity to talk to him at length the evening before and get a real feel for how strikingly effective the new drugs, ibrutinib and CAL101, appear to be in CLL. Rick has worked with these drugs from the early stages of development and has patients who have been on out-patient oral therapy enjoying an excellent quality of life for a number of years. His talk illustrated the background to their development and mapped out potential future development strategies for these compounds. Clearly these are very exciting times for the clinical development of these therapies for our patients.

Overall, it was a very enjoyable and rewarding meeting. The questions from the floor were excellent, and the discussion between sessions enthusiastic! I very much welcome you all to attend our next meeting on Friday 15th March. This meeting will concentrate on CLL science, with an emphasis on genomics and epigenetics in CLL. More details will follow on the website soon.

With best wishes to you all

George Follows
UK CLL Forum Chair
Cambridge, 12 October 2012