Interferon Gamma Fails to Help Patients with IPF

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DENVER — Interferon gamma failed to help patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, according to National Jewish Professor of Medicine Roland du Bois, MD, and his colleagues. Results from the study, called INSPIRE, were reported June 30 in the online version of the journal *The Lancet.*

"This was a disappointing outcome," said Dr. du Bois. "It is a very tough disease."

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, is a lung disease of unknown cause in which progressive scarring leads to shortness of breath, poor oxygen exchange, respiratory failure and death. Approximately 40,000 people in the United Stated die of IPF each year, an average of two to five years after diagnosis. Lung transplants can be effective but most patients die before receiving new lungs. Otherwise, there is no known effective treatment for IPF.

Previous research had suggested that interferon gamma, a protein that is produced in the human body, and already approved as a medication for other diseases, might help IPF patients live longer. In the human body, it functions as a signaling molecule that has anti-scarring, infection-fighting, and immune modulating effects.

Dr. du Bois, Talmadge King, MD, of the University of California, San Francisco, and their colleagues at 81 medical centers in Europe, Canada and the United States recruited 826 patients with IPF for the largest treatment study of IPF every undertaken. They gave 551 of the patients interferon gamma three times a week, and 275 patients a placebo. After a median duration of 64 weeks on treatment 80 (15 percent) of patients on interferon gamma had died while 35 (13 percent) of patients on placebo had died. The trial was stopped early when it became clear that the medication offered no significant benefit in either survival or other disease-related measures.

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