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Immunotherapeutic potential of varicella vaccine in smoldering and cutaneous adult T-cell leukemia/lymphoma

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There are several subtypes of HTLV-1-induced adult T-cell leukemia/lymphoma (ATLL): acute, lymphoma, chronic, and smoldering. Chronic and smoldering ATLL have a relatively good prognosis, even without treatment. However, these types can evolve to acute type ATLL, which has a poor prognosis. Previously we experienced some ATLL patients with improving skin involvements after suffering from herpes zoster and we reported that varicella-zoster virus could be capable of activating the immune system by the manifestation of active inflammation. We postulated that varicella vaccine could be a novel immunotherapeutic agent against ATLL. According to the original protocol, patients received a biweekly administration of varicella vaccine. In this retrospective study, 33 patients were recruited in our institute between March 2002 and December 2010. All patients with a previously untreated and histology proven ATLL were eligible for the purpose of the study. Complete response lasting for six months or more was seen in 6 (18%), partial response in 2 (6%), and no response in 7 (21%) patients, with a median follow-up duration of 27 months (range, 6-99 months). The median overall survival was 24 months and this was significantly longer compared to previously reported findings (16 months). No serious adverse events were observed. In conclusion, smoldering ATLL with the skin lesions and cutaneous ATLL are promising candidates for this varicella vaccine immunotherapy.

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