Losing Lesions

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A relatively new chemotherapy called vinorelbine (Navelbine) may provide hope for those whose Kaposi's sarcoma (KS) treatments have failed. According to Dr. Domenico Erranto, a researcher with the Italian Cooperative Group on AIDS and Tumors, the combination of vinorelbine with G-CSF (Neupogen, used to counter white blood cell loss) resulted in improvement (KS regression) in over half of the patients he studied, and stabilization (holding the KS in check) in another 30 percent.

Even better, survival increased, with 80 percent of those who responded to the drug combo living at least seven months, and 20 percent survived more than two years. These results are impressive, since survivors had previously relapsed on standard chemotherapies. There are the usual side effects of nausea, fatigue, hair loss, peripheral neuropathy and possibly severe bone marrow suppression. Be warned: Health insurance may not cover vinorelbine, since it was FDA-approved for other cancers and must be prescribed "off-label" for KS. And treatment ain't cheap -- for the average-size person (doses are size- and weight-dependent), each week of therapy would cost a whopping $1,432 -- $340 for the Navelbine and $1,093 for daily G-CSF injections.

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