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New therapeutic drug offers hope for bone marrow cancer patients

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A therapeutic drug has been found to improve outcomes and survival rates for patients with a serious type of bone marrow cancer.

In a clinical trial by researchers at Newcastle University in Britain, patients with newly diagnosed myeloma were treated with a drug called lenalidomide.

The results, published in the journal The Lancet Oncology, showed an improvement for those who received lenalidomide drug, compared to those not receiving it.

"This is a major breakthrough as it shows that the long-term use of lenalidomide significantly improves the time myeloma patients stay in remission after initial therapy," said Professor Graham Jackson from the Northern Institute for Cancer Research at Newcastle.

Myeloma is a cancer of the plasma cells and it can affect several areas of the body, such as the spine, skull, pelvis and ribs. Current treatment usually involves chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant.

"It is a huge step and, importantly, identifies that for younger patients lenalidomide improves their overall survival for this difficult-to-treat bone marrow cancer," Jackson said.

"Our research highlights that lenalidomide should be considered for newly diagnosed patients following stem-cell transplantation," he added.

As part of the study, a total of 1,137 newly diagnosed patients were randomly assigned to lenalidomide maintenance therapy and 834 patients to observation - this was after they completed their initial treatment.

The results show that lenalidomide can prolong the average remission time by more than two years in younger patients and by well over a year in older, less fit patients.

It reduced the risk of progression or death by more than 50 per cent in both groups, reported IANS