

PRECISION CANCER THERAPIES

OWEN A. O'CONNOR SERIES EDITOR

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2

**Immunologic
Approaches for the
Treatment of
Lymphoid Malignancies**

From Concept to Practice

Editors

Owen A. O'Connor • Stephen M. Ansell • John G. Gribben

WILEY Blackwell

Precision Cancer Therapies

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Volume 2

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Contents

List of Contributors	<i>xix</i>
Volume Foreword	<i>xxiv</i>
Volume Preface	<i>xxvi</i>
Series Preface	<i>xxviii</i>

Section I Historical Perspective 1

1 The Distinguished History of Immunotherapy Development in Cancer 3

Stephen M. Ansell

Take Home Messages	3
Introduction	3
The Beginnings of Immunotherapy	3
The Central Role of the Immune System	4
Cytokines	4
Antibody Based Therapy	4
Immune Checkpoint Therapy	5
Vaccines	5
CAR T-cells and Adoptive Cell Therapy	5
Summary	5
Must Reads	6
References	6

Section II Targeting Cell Surface Receptors 9

2 Development of Monoclonal Antibodies for the Treatment of Lymphoma: Setting the Stage 11

George J. Weiner

Take Home Messages	11
Introduction	11
Magic Bullets	11
Monoclonal Antibodies	11
Proof of Concept – Anti-idiotypic mAb	12
Chimeric, Humanized, and Human mAb	12
Rituximab	12
Anti-lymphoma mAb Mechanisms of Action	12
Target Epitopes	13
Enhancing mAb Effector Function	13
Alternative Target Antigens	13
Alternative Strategies to Leverage the Unique Aspects of mAb Therapy	13
Radioimmunotherapy Based on Anti-sera	14
Mab-based Radioimmunotherapy	14
Radioimmunotherapy of B Cell Lymphoma	15

Immunotoxins	16
Antibody-drug Conjugates	16
Retargeting T Cells	16
Bispecific Antibodies	17
Chimeric Antigen Receptor T Cells	17
Bispecific Antibodies versus CAR-T	17
Immune Checkpoint Blockade in Lymphoma	17
Remaining Questions	18
Conclusion	18
Must Reads	18
References	18
3 Pharmacology to Practice: The Similarities and Differences of Drugs Targeting CD20	22
<i>Jennifer K. Lue and Bruce D. Cheson</i>	
Take Home Messages	22
Introduction	22
Anti-CD20 Monoclonal Antibody Development	22
Rituximab	23
Ofatumumab	24
Ublituximab	24
Obinutuzumab	25
Resistance to Anti-CD20 Monoclonal Antibodies	26
Combinations Using Bruton Tyrosine Kinase Inhibitor and Anti-CD20 Monoclonal Antibodies	27
Radiolabeled Anti-CD20 Antibodies: I-131 Tositumomab and Y-90 Ibritumomab Tiuxetan	28
Anti-CD20 Antibody Drug Conjugates	29
CD20 Bispecific Antibodies	30
Anti-CD20 Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T-cell Therapy	31
Conclusion	32
Must Reads	33
References	33
4 Pharmacology to Practice: Targeting CD19 and 22	40
<i>Nilanjan Ghosh and Sonali M. Smith</i>	
Take Home Messages	40
Introduction	40
CD19 and CD22 Surface Antigens	40
CD19 Antigen	40
CD22 Antigen	41
Therapeutic Targeting: CD19	41
Approved Agents Targeting CD19	42
Tafasitamab	42
Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics	42
Clinical Efficacy	42
Safety and Tolerability	43
Indication for Tafasitamab	44
Loncastuximab Tesirine	44
Introduction to Loncastuximab Tesirine	44
Pharmacokinetics	44
Pharmacodynamics and Distribution	45
Clinical Efficacy	45
Safety and Tolerability	45

Indication for Loncastuximab Tesirine	46
Emerging Agents Targeting CD19	46
Denintuzumab Mafodotin	46
Bispecific Antibodies Targeting CD19	46
Sequencing CD19 Directed Therapies in the Treatment of R/R LBCL	47
Therapeutic Targeting: CD22	47
Antibody Drug Conjugates Targeting CD22	48
Bispecific Antibody Targeting CD22	48
Summary	48
Must Reads	49
References	49

5 Targeting Other Promising Cell Surface Receptors: ROR1, CD38, CD25, and CCR4 52

Michael Wang

Take Home Messages	52
Introduction	52
Receptor Tyrosine Kinase-like Orphan Receptor 1 (ROR1)	52
ROR1 Biology	52
Role of ROR1 in Cancer	53
Role of ROR1 in Hematologic Cancers	53
Therapies Targeting ROR1	53
Safety of Therapies Targeting ROR1	57
Future Directions	58
CD38	58
CD38 and Its Biological Functions	58
CD38 Expression in Lymphoid Malignancies	58
CD38-targeted Treatments in Lymphoid Malignancies	59
The Interleukin 2 Receptor α Chain (CD25)	60
The Biology of CD25	60
CD25 Pathophysiology	61
Targeting CD25 as a Therapeutic Strategy	61
C-C Motif Chemokine Receptor 4 (CCR4)	62
CCR4 Targeting and Therapy	62
CCR4 Expression in Normal and Cancerous Cells	62
The Role of CCR4 in Immune Regulation	63
CCR4 and Hematological Malignancies	63
CCR4 Targeting/Therapy	63
Conclusions and Perspectives	64
Must Reads	64
References	64

Section III Antibody Drug Conjugates (ADC) 73

6 Principles of Antibody Drug Development 75

Eric L. Sievers

Take Home Messages	75
Introduction	75
Brief History	75
Design Principles	77
Target Antigen Selection	78
Antibody Characteristics	79

	Cytotoxic Drug Potency	79
	Linker Selections and Conjugation Strategies	80
	ADCs Currently Approved for Lymphoid Malignancies	80
	Brentuximab Vedotin	80
	Inotuzumab Ozogamicin	81
	Polatuzumab Vedotin	81
	Belantamab Mafodotin	81
	Loncastuximab Tesirine	81
	Future	81
	Must Reads	82
	References	82
7	Targeting CD30 in Lymphoid Neoplasms	87
	<i>Barbara Pro</i>	
	Take Home Messages	87
	Introduction	87
	Receptor Function and Structure	87
	Strategies for Targeting CD30	88
	Clinical Experience	90
	Conclusions and Future Directions	94
	Must Reads	95
	References	95
8	Targeting CD79b in B-cell Malignancies	100
	<i>Colette Owens and Gilles Salles</i>	
	Take Home Messages	100
	Introduction	100
	Polatuzumab Vedotin Preclinical Development	101
	Clinical Results	102
	Phase 1 and 2 in Patients with Relapsed/Refractory (R/R) Lymphoma	102
	The Randomized Phase 2 Study in Patients with Relapsed or Refractory DLBCL	102
	Moving Polatuzumab Vedotin in the Front-line Management of DLBCL	103
	Polatuzumab Vedotin Combination in Other B-cell Lymphoma Histology	104
	Novel Investigational Combinations of Polatuzumab with Targeted Therapy	105
	Resistance Mechanisms to Polatuzumab Vedotin: Facts and Hypothesis	105
	Conclusion	106
	Must Reads	106
	References	106
9	Radioimmunotherapy: Is There Any Future Role?	108
	<i>Alessandro Broccoli and Pier Luigi Zinzani</i>	
	Take Home Messages	108
	Introduction	108
	Principles of Radioimmunotherapy in Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas	108
	⁹⁰ Y-ibritumomab Tiuxetan	109
	Clinical Experience with ⁹⁰ Y-IT	111
	Lilotomab Satetraxetan	117
	Conclusion	118
	Must Reads	118
	References	119

Section IV Targeting Immune Checkpoint 123

10 The Biology of Immune Checkpoint Blockade 125

Timothy N. Bullock

Take Home Messages 125

Introduction 125

Recognition of Antigen 126

T Cells 126

NK Cells 128

Failure of Immunosurveillance in Cancer 129

Induction of Checkpoint Inhibitor Expression 129

Mechanism of Action of Checkpoint Inhibitor Molecules 131

Competition and Redirection of Costimulation 131

Recruitment of Phosphatases 132

SHP1/SHP2 Phosphatases 132

PP2A 133

Unresolved Mechanisms 134

Mechanism of Action of Checkpoint Inhibitors 135

Current Areas of Study 135

Summary 135

References 135

11 Mechanism of Action and Pharmacologic Features of Drugs Targeting PD-1/PDL-1 and CTLA-4 139

Marc-Anthony Rodriguez, Ryan Bucktrout, Andrea Orlando, Inna Serganova, and Roberta Zappasodi

Take Home Messages 139

Introduction 139

Structure and Effector Functions of mAb Therapeutics 140

Overview of PD-1 and PD-L1 Molecules 140

Mechanisms of Action of PD-1 and PD-L1 Inhibitors 141

Pharmacodynamic Effects of PD-1 and PD-L1 Inhibitors 143

Overview of the CTLA4 Pathway 144

Effects of CTLA-4 Blocking Mechanisms Mediated by anti-CTLA-4 mAbs 145

Fc-dependent Mechanisms of anti-CTLA-4 mAbs 146

Mechanisms of Action of ICB in B-cell Lymphomas 147

Expression Pattern and Function of Immune Checkpoints in Normal GCs 147

Expected Activity of ICB in B-cell Lymphomas Based on Immune Checkpoint Expression 149

Future Outlook 151

Must Reads 151

References 151

12 Other Immune Checkpoint Targets of Interest 156

Clifford M. Cszimar and Stephen M. Ansell

Take Home Messages 156

Introduction 156

TIM-3 157

Structure and Signaling 157

Ligands 157

Galectin-9 157

Ceacam-1 159

HMGB1 159

Phosphatidylserine	160
Expression and Function within the TME	160
T Helper Cells	161
T Regulatory Cells	161
Cytotoxic T Cells	161
Natural Killer Cells	161
Monocytes and Macrophages	161
Dendritic Cells	162
Myeloid Derived Suppressor Cells	162
Tumor Cells	162
Translation into a Clinical Target	162
Pre-clinical Models of TIM-3 Blockade	162
Role as a Prognostic Marker	163
Clinical Experience with TIM-3 Inhibitors	163
LAG-3	164
Structure and Signaling	164
Ligands	164
MHC Class II	164
Galectin-3	165
CLEC4G	165
FGL1	165
Expression and Function within the TME	165
Effector CD4 ⁺ and CD8 ⁺ T Cells	165
Tregs	166
Other Cell Types	167
Tumor Cells	167
Translation into a Clinical Target	167
Pre-clinical Models of LAG-3 Genetic Deficiency	167
Pre-clinical Models of LAG-3 Blockade	167
Role as a Prognostic Marker	168
Clinical Experience with LAG-3 Inhibitors	168
TIGIT	169
Structure and Signaling	169
Ligands	171
CD155	171
CD112	171
CD226	171
Expression and Function within the TME	171
Effector CD4 ⁺ and CD8 ⁺ T Cells	171
Regulatory T Cell Populations	172
NK Cells	172
Translation into a Clinical Target	172
Pre-clinical Models of TIGIT Blockade	172
Role as a Prognostic Marker	173
Clinical Experience with TIGIT Inhibitors	173
Remaining Challenges and Opportunities	174
Balancing Autoimmunity and Anti-tumor Efficacy	174
Biomarkers for Treatment Response	175
Other Immune Checkpoints	175
Conclusions	176
Conflicts of Interest	177
Must Reads	177
References	177

13 Clinical Experiences with Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors in Lymphomas 190*John M. Timmerman*

Take Home Messages 190

Rationale for Checkpoint Inhibitors in Lymphomas 190

CTLA Blockade 190

PD-1 Blockade 190

Early Experiences with PD-1 Blockade in Hematologic Malignancies 190

Phase II Registration Trials of PD-1 Blockade in Hodgkin Lymphoma: A Therapeutic Revolution 192

Pivotal Trials of Nivolumab and Pembrolizumab in Hodgkin Lymphoma 192

Real-world Data on PD-1 Blockade in Hodgkin Lymphoma 193

Addition of PD-1 Blockade to Chemotherapy in Hodgkin Lymphoma: Combination with AVD 193

Addition of PD-1 Blockade to Brentuximab Vedotin 194

Which Is the Better Agent to Combine with AVD Chemotherapy in New HL: Nivolumab or Brentuximab Vedotin? 194

Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation for Hodgkin Lymphoma in Era of PD-1 Blockade 194

Other anti-PD-1 Antibodies Approved for Use in Hodgkin Lymphoma 195

Phase I and II Trials of PD-1 Blockade in Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma 195

Nivolumab 195

Nivolumab Plus Ipilimumab in Lymphomas 196

Phase II Trials of Nivolumab in DLBCL and FL: Missing the Mark 196

Pembrolizumab 196

Special Populations of NHL Responsive to PD-1 Blockade 196

Primary Mediastinal B Cell Lymphoma 196

Richter's Transformation 197

Primary Central Nervous System (CNS) and Testicular Lymphomas 197

T Cell and Natural killer/T (NK/T) Cell Lymphomas 197

Post-transplant Lymphoproliferative Disease (PTLD) 197

Burkitt Lymphoma 197

Combination of Checkpoint Inhibitors with Other Agents in Lymphomas 197

Combinations with CTLA-4 Inhibitors 198

Rituximab 198

Combinations with PD-1 and PD-L1 Inhibitors 198

Rituximab 198

Bruton's Tyrosine Kinase (BTK) Inhibitors 198

Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T Cells 198

Bispecific Antibodies 198

Hypomethylating Agents 201

Newer Checkpoint Inhibitors in Lymphomas 202

LAG-3 202

TIM-3 202

TIGIT 202

BTLA 203

CD47 203

Summary and Future Prospects for Checkpoint Inhibitors in Lymphomas 203

Must Reads 203

References 204

Section V Targeting Macrophages and sirp- α – Disrupting the “Do Not Eat Me” 209**14 The Role of CD47 in Lymphoma Biology and Strategies for Therapeutic Targeting 211***Mithunah Krishnamoorthy, Robert A. Uger, and Mark Wong*

Take Home Messages 211

Introduction 211

CD47-SIRPα Biology	212
CD47 Structure and Expression	212
SIRPα Structure and Expression	212
Anti-Phagocytosis Signaling	213
Non-phagocytic Functions	213
Role of CD47 in Lymphoma	214
B-cell Lymphoma	214
T Cell Lymphoma (TCL)	214
Strategies for Therapeutic Targeting of the CD47- SIRPα Axis	215
Magrolimab – the First CD47 Antibody, with a Unique Dosing Strategy to Limit Anemia	215
Lemzoparlimab – a Second Generation Antibody with Minimal RBC Binding	217
TTI-621/TTI-622 – SIRPαFc Fusion Proteins with Minimal RBC Binding that Deliver Different “Eat Me” Signals	217
Evorpcept – A High Affinity SIRPαFc Fusion Protein Engineered for Combination Use	218
TG-1801 – A CD47/CD19 IgG1 Bispecific Designed for Greater Tumor Specificity	218
HX009 – A CD47/PD-1 Bispecific for Blockade of Innate and Adaptive Immune Checkpoints	219
GS-0189 – A SIRPα Antibody Designed for Improved Safety and Combination Use	219
Single Agent Activity in Lymphoma	219
Conclusions	220
Disclosures	220
Must Reads	220
References	220

15 Single Agent and Rational Combination Experiences with Anti-CD47 Targeted Drugs 225

Nadia Khan, Swathi Namburi, and Krish Patel

Take Home Messages	225
Introduction	225
Mechanistic Basis for CD47 Targeted Therapies	225
Pre-clinical and Clinical Studies of CD47 Targeting Therapies	226
Magrolimab (Hu5F9-G4)	226
CC-90002	227
TTI-621	228
TTI-622	229
ALX148	229
Summary	229
Future Directions	230
Must Reads	230
References	230

Section VI EBV Directed Immunotherapies 233

16 Understanding the Role of EBV Infection in Lymphomagenesis 235

Hiroshi Kimura and Takayuki Murata

Take Home Messages	235
Introduction	235
EBV-related Lymphoid Malignancies	235
Types of EBV Infection and the Associated Viral Expression Profiles	236
Mechanism of Lymphomagenesis in EBV-associated Lymphomas	238
Roles of EBV Genes	238
Roles of Host Genes and Epigenetic Modifications	239
Burkitt Lymphoma	239
EBV-positive Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma, Not Otherwise Specified	240

Extra Nodal NK/T Cell Lymphoma, Nasal Type	240
Chronic Active EBV Disease	240
Immunological Aspects	240
Conclusion	242
Acknowledgments	242
Must Reads	242
References	242

17 Immunologic Therapies in Development for EBV Driven Lymphoid Malignancies 246

Jason Yongsheng CHAN, Seok Jin Kim, Soon Thye LIM, Choon Kiat ONG, and Won Seog Kim

Take Home Messages	246
Classes of Immunologic Therapies for EBV-driven Lymphoid Malignancies	246
Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors	246
Cellular Therapies	248
Other Strategies – Antibodies, Antibody-drug Conjugates, HDAC Inhibitors	249
Relevant Preclinical Data for Novel Strategies against EBV-driven Lymphoid Malignancies	249
Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors	249
Lytic Induction Therapy	250
Prophylactic EBV Vaccines	250
Therapeutic EBV Vaccines	251
Cellular Therapy against EBV-associated Lymphoma	251
Future Directions	252
Must Reads	253
References	253

Section VII Exploiting Tumor Associated Antigens with Autologous T-Cells 257

18 The Scientific Rationale for Targeting Tumor-Associated Antigens 259

Jean-Sébastien Delisle and Marie-France Aubin

Take Home Messages	259
Introduction	259
The Rules of Engagement; T-cell Biology and the Recognition of Self versus Non-self	259
Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC) – Associated Peptides in Lymphoproliferative Diseases	260
The Origin and Discovery of MHC-associated Cancer Antigens	260
Histocompatibility Antigens	261
Viral Antigens	263
Tumor-specific (TSA) and Associated (TAA) Antigens	263
T-cell Therapy; Summary of the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Different Antigen Classes	265
The TAA Expressed in Lymphoid Malignancies	265
Turning TAAs into Actionable Targets for T-cell Immunotherapy	269
Leveraging Naturally Occurring High Affinity/avidity TAA-specific TCR	269
TCR Enhancement to Target TAA	270
Other Considerations in TAA-directed Adoptive Immunotherapy	270
Conclusion	271
Must Reads	272
References	272

19 Clinical Experiences with TAA-T in Lymphoid Malignancies 276

Keri Toner, Hannah Kinoshita, and Catherine M. Bollard

Take Home Messages	276
Background	276

CAR-T versus TAA-T	277
Targeting Lymphoid-specific Antigens	277
Other Clinically Targeted TAAs	279
Combination Therapies	279
Manufacturing	279
Open Clinical Trials	280
Benefits and Barriers	282
Future Directions	282
Summary	283
Must Reads	283
References	284

Section VIII Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-Cells (CAR-T) 289

20 The Science of CAR-T Cell Technology 291

Richard C. Godby, Allison M. Bock, Saad S. Kenderian, and Yi Lin

Take Home Messages	291
Background	291
T Cell Function and Dysregulation in Cancer	291
CAR Constructs	293
CAR-T Composition	294
T Cell Fitness for Autologous CAR-T Generation	295
Leukapheresed Cell Characteristics	295
T Cell Composition and Phenotype for Functionality	296
CAR-T Resistance	296
Tumor-induced Mechanisms of Resistance	296
T Cell Dysfunction	297
Tumor Microenvironment-induced T Cell Inhibition	297
T-regulatory Cells	297
Inhibitory Myeloid Cells	297
Cancer Associated Fibroblasts	298
Extracellular Vesicles	298
Allogeneic CAR-T	298
Collection and Manufacturing	299
Must Reads	300
References	300

21 The Spectrum of CAR T Assets in Development: Similarities and Differences 304

J. Erika Haydu and Jeremy S. Abramson

Take Home Messages	304
Introduction	304
Overcoming CAR T Antigen Escape	305
Tandem CARs	306
Sequential CARs	307
Upregulating Target Antigen Expression	308
Novel Approaches in CAR T-cell Engineering	308
Armored CARs	308
Targeting the TRAC Locus	308
Designing Third Generation CARs	308
Ex Vivo Manipulation of CAR T-cells	309
CAR T Combination Strategies	310
CAR T in Combination with Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors	310

CAR T in Combination with BTKi	311
CAR T in Combination with Immunomodulatory Agents	312
Expanding the Repertoire of CAR Antigen Targets	312
CAR T in Hodgkin Lymphoma	312
CAR T in T-cell Lymphomas	312
Conclusions	313
Must Reads	313
References	313

22 Clinical Experience with CAR-T Cells for Treatment of B-cell Lymphomas 318

Stephen J. Schuster and John G. Gribben

Take Home Messages	318
Introduction	318
Clinical Trials	321
CD19-directed CAR-T Cells in B-Cell Lymphomas	321
ZUMA-1 Study	325
TRANSCEND	326
Real World Evidence	326
Moving CAR-T into Second Line Treatment in Large B Cell Lymphoma	328
ZUMA-7	328
TRANSFORM	328
BELINDA	330
CAR-T in Follicular Lymphoma	330
ZUMA-5 Axi-cel in Indolent Lymphoma	330
The ELARA Trial: Tisa-Cel in Relapsed/Refractory Follicular Lymphoma	332
Mantle Cell Lymphoma	332
ZUMA-2	332
CD19-directed CAR-T Cell Trials in Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL)	333
Conclusions	337
Must Reads	337
References	338

23 “Off the Shelf” CAR-T/NK Cells 341

Nancy D. Marin, Alice Zhou, Miriam T. Jacobs, and Todd A. Fehniger

Take Home Messages	341
Introduction	341
General Aspects of Off-the-shelf Cellular Therapy	342
Gene Editing Technologies	343
Preventing GVHD from Allogeneic Cellular Therapy	343
Preventing Allo Rejection of Cell Therapy	344
Engineering Allogeneic Cells with Synthetic Biology	345
Cellular Sources for Off-the-shelf Therapies	346
Peripheral Blood	346
Umbilical Cord Blood	347
iPSC-Derived	347
Off-the-shelf T Cell Therapy	347
Point of Care T Cell Therapy	347
Expanded Blood T Cell Therapies	348
Off-the-shelf Specific T Cells for EBV-associated Malignancies	349
Umbilical Cord Blood Derived T Cells	349
iPSC Derived T Cell Therapy	349
T Cell Therapies for T and NK Cell Malignancies	349

Non-classical T Cell Therapies	350
Off-the-shelf NK Cells	350
NK Cell Biology and Distinction from T Cells	350
Point-of-care Manufactured NK Cell Therapy	351
Memory-like NK Cell Therapy	351
Expanded Blood NK Cell Therapy	352
Umbilical Cord Blood (UCB, CB) Expanded or Differentiated NK Cells	352
iPSC-Differentiated NK Cell Therapy	353
NK Cell Line Based Therapy	354
Conclusions and Future Directions	354
Must Reads	354
References	355

24 Programming Myeloid Cells with Chimeric Antigen Receptor Myeloid-Based Therapies 360

Miriam Barnett, Michele Gerber, Siddhartha Mukherjee, and Daniel Getts

Take Home Messages	360
Introduction	360
Myeloid Cells and the Lymphoma Tumor Microenvironment	362
Harnessing the Multi-potent Diversity of Monocytes for Immunotherapy	362
Harnessing Monocyte Differentiation into Dendritic Cells, Macrophages and their Associated Effector Functions	364
Engineering the Bridge between Innate and Adaptive Immunity to Trigger Durable Anti-Tumor Immune Responses	364
Engineering Phagocytosis for Tumor Killing	365
Engineering Myeloid Cells for Antigen Presentation	366
Myeloid Cell Engineering Practical Considerations	366
Building off of the CAR-T Foundation	366
Engineered Myeloid Cells and the Future of Immunotherapy	367
Must Reads	367
References	367

Section IX Miscellaneous Topics in Immunotherapy 373

25 Mechanistic Basis and Role of Immunomodulatory Drugs 375

John G. Gribben

Take Home Messages	375
Introduction	375
IMiDs	375
CELMoDs – New Generation of Immunomodulatory Drugs	376
Potential Neo-substrates of Immunomodulatory Drugs	378
PROTACS: The Ubiquitin-proteasome System-mediated Degradation of Target Proteins	379
Alternative Degradation Approaches to PROTACs	380
Antiviral PROTACs	380
Alternative PROTAC Modalities	381
Other Mechanisms of Action of IMiDs	381
Conclusions and Perspectives	382
Must Reads	382
References	382

26 Analytical Tools to Quantitate Immune Mediated Effects: What Should We Measure and How? 384*Kevin D. Pavelko and Jose C. Villasboas*

Take Home Messages 384

Introduction 384

The Case for Comprehensive and Unbiased Immune Profiling in Lymphoma 385

Biospecimens: What to Choose, How to Preserve 385

Cells in Suspension 386

Soluble Factors 388

Cells in Tissue Context 388

Overview of Immunological Assays 388

Analysis of Single Cells in Suspension 388

Fluorescence-based Flow Cytometry 388

Mass Cytometry 390

Single Cell Genomic Assays 391

Analysis of Soluble Factors 391

Single-cell Secretome Analysis 391

Analysis of Tissue 392

Bulk Analysis of Dissociated Tissue 392

Microregional Analysis of Intact Tissue 392

Single Cell Analysis of Intact Tissue 393

Conclusion 394

Must Reads 394

References 394

27 The Role of the Microbiome in Immune Response 397*Máire A. Conrad, Kathleen E. Sullivan, and Judith Kelsen*

Take Home Messages 397

Introduction 397

Genetic Influence on Host Immune-microbe Interactions 398

Environmental Influence on Host Immune-microbe Interactions 399

Innate Immune System and Microbiota 399

Adaptive Immune System and Microbiota 400

The Role of Aberrant Host Immune-microbe Relationships in Disease 401

Inflammatory Bowel Disease 401

Malignancy 401

Gut Microbiome in Immune-related Toxicity 403

Conclusion 403

Must Reads 403

References 403

28 Epigenetic Drugs as Modulators of Tumor Immunogenicity and Host Immune Response 406*Enrica Marchi, Ipsita Pal, John Sanil Manvalan, Kalleesh Danappa Jayappa, and Owen A. O'Connor*

Take Home Messages 406

Introduction 406

Putting Epigenetic Biology and the Drugs That Target the Epigenome in Context 407

The Connection Between the Epigenome and Immunome 408

The Role of Epigenetic Drugs on Viral Immune Response 411

Clinical Evidence of the Immunomodulatory Activity of Epigenetic Targeted Drugs 413

Conclusions and Future Directions 423

Acknowledgments 423

Must Reads 424

References 424

29 Tailoring Specific Radiographic Response Criteria for Immunologic Therapies in Lymphoma 429

Bruce D. Cheson

Take Home Messages 429

Introduction to Lymphoma Staging and Response Assessment 429

Treatment Related Flare Response and Pseudoprogession 430

The LYRIC Criteria 430

PET-CT in the Time of COVID-19 432

Circulating Tumor DNA 432

Conclusions 433

Must Reads 433

References 433

Index 436

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Volume Foreword

Immunologically-based treatment for lymphoid malignancies has evolved dramatically in the quarter century since the human-murine chimeric monoclonal antibody, rituximab, became the first FDA-approved anticancer immunotherapy and entered routine clinical use. This agent emerged from early proof of principle work in B-cell lymphomas with anti-idiotypic and, later, anti-CD20 and anti-CD19 monoclonals developed by Levy and others (Maloney et al. 1994, 1997; Meeker et al. 1985; Nadler et al. 1981). As a “naked” antibody, rituximab engaged intrinsic cytotoxic T-cell immunity and complement-based mechanisms and proved efficacious as a single agent in relapsed or refractory follicular lymphoma (McLaughlin et al. 1998) and, in short order, for other indolent B-cell malignancies. In pivotal phase 3 trials, rituximab combined with cytotoxic chemotherapy significantly improved cure rates and survival in diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, setting a standard of care which remains to this day (Coiffier et al. 2002; Habermann et al. 2006). Further progress was built upon this foundational work via the characterization of targetable surface antigens, and technologies that create chimeric and humanized antibodies with enhanced clinical activity.

Volume 2 of *Precision Cancer Therapies* provides a timely compendium of progress in both antibody- and cellular-based immunotherapeutics that leverage novel mechanisms of action to improve outcomes for patients with lymphoid malignancies. Broadly viewed, these include “weaponizing” monoclonal antibodies via radioimmunoconjugates and antibody-drug conjugates (ADC) that target B-cell malignancies via antigens such as CD19, CD20 or CD79b, as well as T-cell and Hodgkin lymphomas via CD30 targeting. More recently, bispecific T-cell engaging antibodies and chimeric antigen receptor-T-cells (CAR-T) have demonstrated durable responses in relapsed and refractory B-cell lymphomas, with CAR-T therapy outperforming traditional high-dose chemotherapy and autologous stem cell transplantation at first relapse of diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (Kamdar et al. 2022; Locke et al. 2022). Immune checkpoint inhibitors are firmly established for relapsed Hodgkin lymphoma, and are poised to become integrated into front-line therapy for those with advanced-stage disease (Ansell et al. 2015; Herrera et al. 2023). This Volume also explores novel

targets for lymphoid malignancies such as CD47, the “don’t eat me” signal that, when blocked, therapeutically leads to phagocytosis and destruction of tumor cells.

The theme of rational therapeutic development and targeting is apparent throughout these chapters. The advances reported are built upon a deep and expanding knowledge of lymphoma biology and interactions within the tumor micro-environment, including an increased understanding of the mechanisms of treatment response and resistance. Predictive biomarkers across the many lymphoma subtypes will guide precision medicine approaches for individual patients. Until recently, curative-intent therapy for diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, the most common non-Hodgkin lymphoma entity, involved an anti-CD20 monoclonal antibody plus combination chemotherapy as noted above that cures only 50–60% of patients. Recent insights into the underlying biologic complexity of DLBCL are emerging via molecular profiling and identify unique lymphoma subtypes (Mondello and Ansell 2021; Wilson et al. 2021). These subtypes may be highly responsive to the incorporation of novel agents into current regimens, and diagnostic precision will facilitate clinical trials focused on biologically relevant entities.

How will these powerful advances improve the cure of lymphomas in the coming decade, and potentially reduce early- and late-onset treatment related toxicities? Traditional cytotoxic chemotherapy regimens will be de-escalated in intensity – or eliminated completely – in favor of immunotherapeutic agents alone or in combination with immunomodulatory agents, B-cell receptor pathway inhibitors and apoptosis-inducing agents. New metrics to determine the depth of remission will become standard, and will complement or perhaps even replace imaging-based assessments such as PET/CT scans. Highly sensitive determinations of measurable residual disease (MRD) in the peripheral blood or bone marrow will identify early disease progression and relapse, and dynamic assessment of the MRD kinetic response during induction therapy will enhance risk-adapted treatment approaches (Hoster et al. 2023; Melani et al. 2018).

The exciting progress of the past 25 years continues at an ever-accelerating pace, encompassing an array of therapeutic targets and modalities coupled with vital insights to

lymphoma entities and their unique biology. It is indeed a hopeful and promising time for our patients, as is the need for ongoing international collaboration of laboratory and clinical scientists. The opportunities and dedication to progress are apparent in these pages, and provide a roadmap to continued success.

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Volume Preface

Cancer immunotherapy, the science of mobilizing the immune system to treat cancer, has been pursued for more than 150 years, yet it is only relatively recently that this powerful strategy has finally come of age and taken center stage in oncology. The history and background of the field is described in this Volume in Chapter 1 where we read that the concept of activating the immune system to treat cancer was initially tested in the 1860's. Despite the attraction of the approach and anecdotal evidence of success and continued efforts, immunotherapy was nonetheless largely displaced in mainstream oncology by the advent of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. However, the specificity of the immune response and the potential to develop therapy with less toxicity continued to make immunotherapy an attractive if still somewhat elusive goal, and led to much further pre-clinical work.

The major advances that have laid the foundation for this new era of immunotherapy largely came in the last decades of last century. A major advance came with the development of monoclonal antibodies (1) for which Milstein and Köhler were awarded the Nobel prize with Niels Jerne in 1984. Not much later, advances in understanding of T cell anti-tumor biology, and genetic engineering led to the concept and design of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells (2). The process of humanization of monoclonal antibodies led to clinical success (3) and approval in 1997 of the anti-CD20 monoclonal antibody rituximab and not long thereafter, CAR T cells targeting CD19 were in clinical development (4). Increases in our knowledge of the mechanisms whereby tumor cells usurp physiologic processes in a pathological way to avoid immune recognition led to clinical development of checkpoint inhibitors to enhance anti-tumor responses (5). These clinical advances all have in common that they were built upon our increased scientific understanding of the immune system and increased bioengineering prowess.

This century has heralded the era of chemo-immunotherapy in which use of at least some form immunotherapy is considered standard of care for almost all cases of B cell lymphoma.

The challenge now is to maximally exploit the power of the immune system without unleashing unwanted auto-immune complications.

This volume on *Precision Cancer Therapies* focusing on immunotherapy in lymphoma is, therefore, very timely. Sections are organized around select concepts of targeting cell surface receptors, use of antibody drug conjugates, use of immune checkpoints, targeting macrophages, targeting EBV, targeting tumor associated antigens using autologous T cells, chimeric antigen receptor T cells and other approaches. The concept of the sections follows the same approach that was used for drug development in Volume 1, namely:

- i) What is the immunological target;
- ii) What are the immune targeting agents at my disposal;
- iii) What is the data supporting their use;
- iv) How do we build upon, improve and optimize the therapy.

In this field with so much scientific advancement occurring at speed obviously leads us to question if text books such as this still have any place left in a modern world? Surely online learning is the way forward and how soon will it be before our diagnostic and therapeutic prowess is challenged by advances in artificial intelligence (AI) in medicine. However, even the most sophisticated AI systems still require learning tools and the quality of the chapters presented here assures me that this volume represents the state of the art of immunotherapy for lymphoma and the suggested reading from each chapter which ensure a solid foundation in the principles of immunotherapy for lymphoma for readers. As always, it is not just the overview of the field that each author brings, but their knowledge and perspective of where we are and where we need to go next that make this Volume so rewarding.

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Series Preface

The pace of growth in scientific literature has been a subject for scientists who like to study bibliometric data, for decades. As early as 1951, Derek John de Solla Price, often regarded as one of the pioneers in studying rates of change in scientific literature, noted that the development of scientific information follows the law of exponential growth (de Solla Price 1951). In 1976, Price concluded that “at any time the rate of growth is proportional to the ... total magnitude already achieved – the bigger a thing is, the faster it grows” (de Solla Price 1976). More recently, in 2018, Fortunato et al. concluded that “early studies discovered an exponential growth in the volume of scientific literature ... a trend that continues with an average doubling period of 15 years” (Fortunato et al. 2018). Barabási and Wang suggested that if the scientific literature doubles every 15 years, “the bulk of knowledge remains always at the cutting edge” (Barabási and Wang 2021). That means, that the bulk of what a typical physician learns in undergraduate, graduate, or medical school is potentially obsolete by the time they assume responsibility for the care of patients, or that the information they rely on today was not yet in the textbooks that laid the foundation for their career.

For practicing oncologists, there in lies the problem. How does one stay abreast of these incomprehensible changes in scientific knowledge, much less understand it in a manner that can be used to help their patients. Cancer medicine has become a field where the need to appreciate basic science, and I emphasize “appreciate” not “comprehensively understand,” has become indispensable. Cancer medicine has become the place where fundamental cellular biology, pharmacology, and clinical medicine all collide, as physicians struggle to understand how they should integrate and evaluate diverse streams of information in order to arrive at the best solution for the patient sitting before them. It has become a field where translating the details of science has taken on larger and larger roles as physicians consider how to cure a disease, palliate pain, or improve the status quo, using only the information they have at their disposal.

Precision Cancer Therapies is designed to try and meet that very need. The volumes that will be produced in the series, the first two of which are devoted to the lymphoid malignancies, are developed around categories of diseases that share common themes in their pathogenesis, and, potentially, the strategies one might consider in targeting their dysregulated biology. Sections are organized around select mechanistic themes in disease biology established as being potentially important in disease pathogenesis, followed by a chapter on the pharmacology of drugs identified as effective in nullifying that abnormal biology. Subsequent chapters in each section are focused on the translational aspects: how does one use the drugs at hand to alter the pathology in a therapeutically meaningful manner. Succeeding chapters highlight actual clinical data with specific drugs as both monotherapies and in “rational” combination. The sections within a volume are designed to share information using the same kind of logic a clinician might invoke in thinking about their patient. Here are some pertinent questions:

- (i) What is the disease biology causing the problem?
- (ii) What are the drugs at my disposal?
- (iii) What is the data for the use of these drugs?
- (iv) Are there ways to improve on these drugs’ efficacy by considering combination effects?

The sections take a decidedly translational approach to the problem.

With the advent of so much web-based learning and now the passion around how artificial intelligence (AI) might transform our approach, some might suggest, why another book, let alone a series of books. The answer lies in the simple fact that there is no substitute or singular surrogate that can replace your very own fund of knowledge. Perhaps the most widely recognized and touted AI approach ever to come to our attention did so in 2011, when we watched, with complete astonishment I might add, IBMs Watson beat the famed Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter in Jeopardy. Jennings and Rutter were the greatest Jeopardy champions of all time: more wins

and more money than any other contestants in the history of the show. But, despite their intellectual prowess, they were no match for a computer that had intensely trained for years and “learned” how to beat Jennings and Rutter by playing simulated games against 100 of the best Jeopardy contestants ever. Yes, Watson too had to learn, and read, and assimilate years of information to compete with the human brain. While Jeopardy may be the most widely recognized and successful adventures for a room-sized computer, other forays of AI – and Watson in particular – in the field of oncology have, thus far at least, fallen short. IBM’s Watson for Oncology has been in development since 2012. It is being developed to provide state-of-the-art personalized treatment recommendations for patients with very specific kinds of malignant disease. Watson has undergone extensive “learning” at some of the most prestigious cancer centers in the world, being nurtured on the nuances of cancer medicine. Comprehensive details around the interpretation of blood tests, pathology, genetics, imaging data, and patient-oriented detail get fed into the computer. Then, the computational prowess of Watson combs through the vast medical literature we discussed above, to generate an evidence-based treatment recommendation for that specific patient. Why did Watson outperform on Jeopardy and underperform in oncology? One reason may be obvious. The state of cancer research and its impact on the practice of cancer medicine is extremely dynamic and in constant flux, at times it relies on instinct and experience, apparently making an appearance on Jeopardy look easy. Encyclopedic facts about the real world change slowly, if at all. Acknowledging that this type of AI technology is in its infancy (though most of us completed medical school, residency, and fellowship in the time Watson has been in development), the decade-long experience of Watson in cancer medicine has to date been less than flattering. The lay press has taken a decidedly negative impression of Watson’s first steps (watson-ibm-c), suggesting that while AI may have enormous appeal to the average observer, it is likely to never replace the intellectual

prowess – and instinct – of that physician sitting in front of a patient. It re-enforces a centuries-old and fundamental truth, “knowledge itself is power,” at least as Sir Francis Bacon understood it.

And so, with some data in hand, and curiosity in endless supply, *Precision Cancer Therapies* intends to help keep physicians, scientists, health care providers, and the motivated reader stay up to date on the dynamic and every growing state of information in our fascinating profession. Sure, Watson and PubMed and Society Guidelines can aid us in our decision-making. However, there is nothing that can replace a good old-fashioned education nor the instinct of an informed practitioner of this most rewarding of crafts.

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