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Harnessing the Power of the Immune System: Cancer Therapies that Boost Immunity to Fight Cancer

Jitsua Usoda*

Department of Biotechnology and Drug Discovery, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems, Okayama University, Japan

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in cancer treatment, focusing on leveraging the body's own immune system to combat cancer. This approach, known as immunotherapy, has revolutionized cancer care by enhancing the immune system's ability to recognize and destroy cancer cells. This article explores various immunotherapies that boost the immune system's response to cancer, highlighting their mechanisms of action, effectiveness, and potential side effects.

Keywords: Immunotherapy; Checkpoint inhibitors; CAR-T cell therapy; Cytokines; Tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes.

Introduction

Traditionally, cancer treatment has relied on surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. While these methods have been effective to some extent, they often come with significant side effects and limitations. In recent years, immunotherapy has emerged as a promising alternative, harnessing the body's natural defense mechanisms to target and destroy cancer cells [1]. Unlike conventional treatments, which directly target cancer cells, immunotherapy works by stimulating the immune system to recognize and attack tumors.

Discussion

Checkpoint inhibitors: One of the most widely used forms of immunotherapy is checkpoint inhibitors. These drugs work by blocking proteins that prevent immune cells from attacking cancer cells. By releasing these brakes, checkpoint inhibitors allow the immune system to mount a more robust response against tumors. Drugs such as pembrolizumab and nivolumab have shown remarkable success in treating various cancers, including melanoma, lung cancer, and bladder cancer [2].

CAR-T cell therapy: CAR-T cell therapy is another innovative form of immunotherapy that involves genetically engineering a patient's own immune cells to recognize and kill cancer cells. In this approach, T cells are extracted from the patient's blood and modified to express chimeric antigen receptors (CARs) that target specific proteins on cancer cells. Once infused back into the patient, these engineered T cells can effectively seek out and destroy tumors. CAR-T cell therapy has demonstrated impressive results in treating certain types of leukemia and lymphoma, leading to long-lasting remissions in some patients.

Cytokine therapy: Cytokines are signaling molecules that regulate the immune response. In cytokine therapy, high doses of cytokines such as interleukin-2 (IL-2) and interferon-alpha are administered to boost the immune system's ability to recognize and attack cancer cells [3]. While cytokine therapy can be effective in some cases, it often causes severe side effects, limiting its widespread use.

Tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes (TILs): TIL therapy involves isolating immune cells from a patient's tumor, expanding them in the laboratory, and then reinfusing them back into the patient. These activated TILs can target and kill cancer cells more effectively than unmodified immune cells. TIL therapy has shown promise in treating melanoma and other solid tumors, with some patients experiencing durable responses.

Monoclonal antibody therapy: Monoclonal antibodies are laboratory-produced molecules designed to mimic the immune system's ability to target specific proteins on cancer cells. These antibodies can be engineered to bind to proteins found on the surface of cancer cells, marking them for destruction by the immune system or by other mechanisms. Monoclonal antibody therapy has been successful in treating various types of cancer, including breast cancer, colorectal cancer, and blood cancers like lymphoma and leukemia [4].

Oncolytic viral therapy: Oncolytic viruses are viruses that selectively infect and replicate within cancer cells, leading to their destruction. These viruses can also stimulate an immune response against the tumor, further enhancing their anti-cancer effects. Oncolytic viral therapy has shown promise in clinical trials for a range of cancers, including melanoma, glioblastoma, and pancreatic cancer. Research is ongoing to optimize the safety and efficacy of these viruses for widespread use in cancer treatment [5].

Combination therapy: Combining different immunotherapy approaches or combining immunotherapy with traditional treatments like chemotherapy or radiation therapy has emerged as a strategy to enhance treatment outcomes. By targeting cancer cells through multiple mechanisms, combination therapy can improve response rates and decrease the likelihood of treatment resistance. For example, combining checkpoint inhibitors with other immunotherapies or with targeted therapies has shown synergistic effects in certain cancers, leading to improved patient outcomes.

Biomarker identification: Biomarkers play a crucial role in predicting which patients are most likely to benefit from

***Corresponding author:** Jitsua Usoda, Department of Biotechnology and Drug Discovery, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems, Okayama University, Japan, E-mail: jitusoda@tokyo-med.ac.jp

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immunotherapy. Biomarker testing can identify patients with specific genetic mutations or protein expression patterns that make them more responsive to certain immunotherapies [6]. For example, the expression of programmed death-ligand 1 (PD-L1) on tumor cells has been used as a biomarker to predict response to checkpoint inhibitors. Identifying and validating biomarkers will continue to be essential for optimizing patient selection and tailoring treatment strategies in immunotherapy [7].

Conclusion

Immunotherapy represents a groundbreaking approach to cancer treatment, offering new hope for patients with advanced or treatment-resistant cancers. By harnessing the power of the immune system, immunotherapy can achieve long-lasting responses with fewer side effects compared to traditional treatments. However, challenges such as immune-related adverse events and resistance mechanisms remain hurdles to overcome. Continued research and innovation in the field of immunotherapy are crucial to unlocking its full potential and improving outcomes for cancer patients worldwide.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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