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# Ovarian Cancer: Rheumatoid Arthritis Drug Shows Promise

18 Jan, 2016  
by Nancy Jobs

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ovarian cancer



The BRCA1 gene was thrust into the public consciousness when actress, activist and Ambassador Angelina Jolie tested positive for the genetic mutation, which is known to increase the risk for some types of breast and ovarian cancers significantly. A mutation in this gene is found in up to 20% of all ovarian cancer cases because a protein created by the BRCA1 gene functions purely to repair DNA. The BRCA1 protein's presence is necessary for keeping DNA damage and cancers under control. When a mutation occurs in the gene, cells are deficient in the BRCA1 protein and unable to repair themselves properly. A study released this week from the UK called *BRCA1 deficiency increases sensitivity of ovarian cancer cells to auranofin* has shown that an older medication used to treat Rheumatoid Arthritis can damage BRCA1 deficient ovarian cancer cells in the lab. Auranofin – a gold-based anti-inflammatory – is currently involved in other cancer studies as well, but this one specifically looked at how the medication damaged two types of ovarian cancer cells – OVCAR5 and SKOV3 – both with and without the BRCA1 mutation.

The cancer cells with the genetic mutation were far more sensitive to auranofin than the cells with the normal levels of the reparative protein. In fact, SKOV3 ovarian cancer cells with BRCA1 deficiency survival dropped to 37% when treated with auranofin. Reduced survival of the OVCAR5 cells with the mutation were observed as well.; this shows promise that auranofin could be used as part of an effective treatment plan for those with BRCA1 related ovarian cancer.

Fortunately, this drug is already approved for treatment as an anti-inflammatory. Basic safety and interaction information for auranofin is well established. Therefore – while more trials are necessary – it will not take the amount of time or finances to implement this is a part of cancer treatment as it would a new drug if it continues to show promise in patient studies.

This study is part of a bigger picture. The precise goal is to understand the mechanics of cell DNA repair in regards to ovarian, lung and other cancers. Harnessing and implementing the ability to repair DNA at the cellular level could lead to new ways to treat cancer in the future.

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**Nancy Jobs**

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