

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## General correspondence

### COVID-19 vaccinations for patients with cancer: many remain unvaccinated despite having priority in the vaccine rollout

We write to share our experience in recruitment to a prospective observational trial of serologic and immunologic response to COVID-19 vaccination in patients with cancer at Monash Health, Melbourne (SerOzNET,<sup>1,2</sup> ACTRN12621001004853). Patients with cancer were identified as vulnerable and placed in Phase Ib for the Australian vaccination rollout due to poorer COVID-19 outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, patients with cancer have reduced immune response to a single dose of the various vaccines, increasing urgency to complete the second dose.<sup>4,5</sup>

SerOzNET is enrolling patients with cancer attending Monash Health who have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine. Among the first 70 patients who expressed interest in participating in July 2021, the following was observed when the patients were contacted by the study team:

- Four (6%) had already booked their first dose.
- Ten (14%) planned to book their first dose themselves; of these, three returned to the study team later asking for assistance with booking due to difficulty navigating the statewide booking system.
- Fifty-six (80%) asked up front for help making their booking.
- Three patients were told to delay vaccination due to treatments: one patient advised by their surgeon to wait until after upcoming surgery, one patient advised by their radiation oncologist to delay until radiotherapy course was completed and one patient advised by their GP to complete chemotherapy first. These are not consistent with the current guidelines.
- Six patients who verbally agreed to proceed later declined due to increasing vaccine hesitancy.

#### References

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- 2 Cancer Australia First Australian clinical trial to study COVID-19 vaccines in patients with all cancers. [cited 2021 Jul 7]. Available from URL: <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/about-us/news/first-australian-clinical-trial-study-covid-19-vaccines-patients-all-cancers>


- 3 Australian Government Department of Health Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) clinical guidance on use of COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2021 (v3.0). 2021 [cited 2021 Jul 6]. Available from URL: [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- 4 Monin L, Laing AG, Muñoz-Ruiz M, McKenzie DR, del Molino del Barrio I, Alaguthurai T *et al.* Safety and immunogenicity of one versus two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine BNT162b2 for patients with cancer: interim analysis of a

- Of the 32 patients aged over 60 years, 5 (16%) indicated they would only accept an mRNA vaccine.

We note many of our patients remain unvaccinated, 5 months into the national rollout scheme, despite this group being prioritised for early vaccination. An unexpected benefit of the SerOzNET study is that we are able to reassure patients of the strong recommendation for vaccination in patients on active cancer treatment, and to assist vulnerable patients navigating the complex vaccine booking system. There is a need for continuing education for the medical community, regarding well supported recommendations for vaccination of priority groups, and for the general population about safety of available vaccines and how to access them. Education and communication will continue to be essential as vaccine recommendations change for vulnerable populations. On 13 August 2021, the United States Centers for Disease Control updated recommendations for immunocompromised patients, recommending a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine due to risk of impaired response to the standard schedule.<sup>6</sup> As recommendations continue to be updated, robust communication strategies will continue to be essential to ensure optimal vaccine use among vulnerable populations.

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prospective observational study. *Lancet Oncol* 2021; **22**: 765–78.

- 5 Palich R, Veyri M, Marot S, Vozy A, Gligorov J, Maingon P *et al.* Weak immunogenicity after a single dose of SARS-CoV-2 mRNA vaccine in treated cancer patients. *Ann Oncol* 2021; **32**: 1051–3.
- 6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 vaccines for moderately to severely immunocompromised people. [cited 2021 Aug 18]. Available from URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>