Is erythropoietin therapy in cancer patients safe?

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Pohl and Ludwig point out the fact that anemia is a frequent and often underestimated problem in cancer patients, and they suggest that its treatment should be performed by the administration of hematopoietic growth factor [1]. We are not too sure that there is enough evidence for the safety of this therapy at the moment. Patients with cancer have a higher incidence of thromboembolic events than the general public. Although studies in the past did not report compromising thromboembolic events during erythropoietin therapy, recent clinical trials and epidemiologic studies unfortunately report an association of erythropoietin therapy and thrombotic events, two trials even had to be discontinued early because of an unexpected high incidence of thrombotic events [2, 3, 4]. We do not know yet if therapy with erythropoietin improves outcome in cancer patients. In this situation, considerable concern about a therapy that might endanger pa-

tients to an extent that could outweigh the potential benefit seems justified.

References

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