A NOVEL APPROACH FOR LOCAL TREATMENT OF

BREAST CANCER

DISSERTATION FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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Conclusion

Breast cancer treatment has undergone immense changes in the century-these last have been prompted mainly by changing models of disease. In addition, brought about change was bv developments in other fields of medicine, for example, availability good anaesthetic technique of allowed Halsted to perform major More recently, patient surgery. advocacy groups have prompted change. Paradoxically this was less relevant for the development of conservative breast surgery but is becoming increasingly important in the demand for sentinel node biopsy in today's patient/ consumer/ client led world.

Breast cancer treatment is mainly directed towards achieving two goals- local tumour control with cosmetic outcome as an important secondary aim and systemic control with personal cure of the disease as the final goal. This thesis deals with the former- the optimal local control of disease.

The history of breast cancer treatment and the concept of local recurrence are dealt with in detail in the first chapter. It appears from various clinical trials of breast conserving surgery that clinically relevant invasive duct carcinoma is to some extent a "focal" disease that is limited to one quadrant of the breast. This may be related to the suggestion that chromosomal abnormalities arise at an early age and are therefore distributed in a segmental fashion along the primary branches of the duct system. These chromosomal abnormalities are probably more important in developing a milieu that is conducive

for transformation rather than actual transformation itself because. the segmental nature is restricted to clinically expressed invasive ductal carcinoma rather than occult or latent cancers. The spatial distribution of latent in situ cancer, as described in the second chapter, is on the other hand not segmental in nature, i.e., occult cancers are distributed evenly in all quadrants of the breast with no difference in such distribution between individual cancer types. It appears that for development of invasive ductal cancer, the local milieu of the surrounding breast tissue is very important and when a conducive milieu is present in any one area of the breast, it promotes the growth of tumours, both primary and recurrent. For lobular cancers and for breasts harbouring extensive intra-ductal cancer, it appears that the surrounding milieu is either less important or, is already conducive to cancer growth in all areas, so that clinically important cancers can develop in all areas of the breast. In addition invasive lobular cancers have been characterized by their ability to secrete proteolytic enzymes allowing an alternative mechanism of local progression to the expansile growth of invasive duct cancers. Further studies in breast cancer involve investigating should the characteristics of breast milieu commonly called 'field change' that induces or promotes cancer growth in particular quadrants.

The next phase in this project was to test the hypothesis that there might be a pre-clinical test that could characterise the clinical relevance of occult cancers. We hypothesised that Magnetic resonance imaging- which relies on tumour vascularity for producing contrast enhanced images, might be able to detect tumours that are more

vascular and therefore. more clinically relevant. However. contrast enhanced MRI proved to be perhaps too sensitive and was able to detect almost all occult cancers that we could subsequently detect using detailed histopathology. We concluded that we should use this new tool with caution and not allow ourselves to be precipitated into a mastectomy for the majority of patients thus overthrowing the wisdom gleaned from the robust results of breast conservation trials.

These biological being the implications of our findings, the clinical implications were rather straightforward, albeit going against dogma the current of breast conservative surgery. The argument for whole breast radiotherapy after breast conservative therapy arose from the idea that breast cancer is a multifocal/multicentric disease, with most (90%) of the multifocality in proximity to the primary tumour. This was the explanation given for the increased incidence of local recurrence near the primary tumour. Our whole organ analysis in 3dimensions found that occult tumours were present in all quadrants and not related to the spatial distribution of the primary tumour and are thus not relevant for early local recurrence - which occurs most commonly in the index quadrant rather than anywhere else, for reasons yet to be elucidated. If the widespread multifocality is not clinically relevant, then the standard whole breast radiotherapy after breast conserving surgery is of questionable value.

We present the problems faced by patients undergoing breast

conserving therapy and health care systems delivering it. The 6-wk course radiotherapy of is costly and inconvenient at best and prohibitive at women worst. Many living in geographically remote areas, far from a radiotherapy centre, cannot take the 6wk holiday in the metropolis to take the radiotherapy course, and not many welfare states can provide for their accommodation or transport. Frequently these women have to choose between mastectomy and breast conservation, on the basis of, not the nature of the cancer, but on whether they can afford commute daily, or to live near the radiotherapy centre for the 30 visits during the course of radiotherapy. A solution to these problems is to deliver radiotherapy only to the quadrant of primary tumour with a technique that can do it in one sitting- preferably in the operating theatre at the time of the primary surgery. We describe one such technique of delivering therapeutic radiation in a standard operating theatre. The machine is called Photon Radiosurgery System (PRS). This technique directs soft x-rays generated with a portable lightweight electronbeam-driven device. These x-rays are generated at the centre of an applicator that can be placed in the tumour bed. So the radiation is from within the breast and as the pliable breast tissue wraps around the applicator, true conformal radiotherapy dosimetry is achieved. The highest dose is delivered to the tissues immediately adjacent to the applicator and normal tissues like skin do not get significant radiation damage. Since the high dose region is of a small volume we expect that the late fibrosis, if any, will not be disfiguring.

We had two tasks- first to test the novel radiotherapy technique and then to test then novel approach of single dose index quadrant radiation. In the first we substituted phase. the conventional 1wk course of tumour bed boost with intra-operative radiotherapy using the PRS device; the remaining 5-wk course of whole breast radiotherapy (50Gy, #25) was delivered as usual. In the pilot phase feasibility we tested the of conducting the clinical trial- patient acceptability, the logistics of coordination between the radiotherapy, radiation physics and surgical departments and the clinical results. We found the usual resistance to change in the administrative circlesbut the business proposition of possible saving money for NHS was attractive to the management. The patient acceptability was the least difficult area- only 2 of the patients offered the novel treatment refused to take part in the pilot study. Many patients were keen not to take the 5wk course, suggesting to us that recruitment in the next phase of the project would be relatively easy. The pilot study and the operative technique are described in the 4th and 5th chapters. There has been no local recurrence in any of the patients on the pilot study at the median follow up of 34 months and the cosmetic outcome is good and the patients are satisfied. The results of the pilot study were instrumental in getting FDA approval for the PRS device

We also used the PRS device in another increasingly common clinical situation. Elderly patients who are not fit for surgery, but are nevertheless known to benefit from local treatment are frequently treated with tamoxifen alone for the want of suitable local therapy. We tested the use of PRS radiotherapy as the primary treatment in these cases. We used the Fischer Mammotest prone table- for stereotactic localisation of the primary tumour and Mammotome vacuum biopsy for limited excision local anaesthetic. under After calibrating the Fischer table for the PRS device, we placed the tip of the bare PRS probe in the centre of the tumour. The radiation dose of over 130 Gy was achieved at the centre with the periphery of the tumour receiving about 20 Gy. We found remarkable response to this treatment. The contrast-enhanced MRI, just 6 days after treatment revealed an almost absence of vascular enhancement in the tumour. All these co-morbid with other patients conditions and short life expectancy have lived the rest of their life without suffering from the morbid sequele of breast cancer.

Encouraged by the results of the pilot phase, we started the randomised trial in March 2000, to test the hypothesis that radiotherapy to the peri-tumoural alone is tissues adequate local treatment. We called it TARGeted Intraoperative radioTherapy (TARGIT) trial. The randomisation procedure was much easier than expected. We were able to recruit more than 90% of patients eligible for the trial. Only 3-4 patients have refused to take partmainly because the option of entry into trial is usually given early in the discussions about treatments and it was too much to take in for the patient. The early cosmetic results are good and there has not been any recurrence although the follow up time is short. Since the numbers needed to prove equivalence are 850 in each arm, a multicentre trial was deemed а necessity. A recent modification will change the trial from an equivalence trial to a trial to test whether a strategy

using Targit for all patients and additional whole breast radiotherapy for high-risk patients reduces local recurrence rates compared with conventional postoperative radiotherapy. Such a trial will need 419 patients in each arm to show a reduction in local recurrence from 9% to 4%.

This trial has attracted worldwide interest and several investigators from Australia, India, UK, Italy and USA are keen to join in. The protocol of the randomised study has been peer-reviewed and published on the Lancet Website.

The implications of proving TARGIT equal to 6-wk course of radiotherapy are far reaching. Firstly, it will save the ordeal that these women have to face to come daily for the 'radiotherapy shot'. As one woman in our trial described it to BBC's Tomorrow's world- 'I felt a bit of a fraud... have I really had cancer treatment? I had finished all my treatment and was back at work in 2 days'. In the more 'prosperous' countries, it will mean saving millions of pounds and radiotherapy resources and for the thousands of women in the developing countries and remote areas of developed world, it will mean they can preserve their breasts!

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