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OHSU Doernbecher is first hospital in Pacific Northwest to offer new FDA-approved treatment for advanced leukemia

Kymriah, first gene transfer therapy in the U.S., now available for children and young adults with ALL

PORTLAND, Ore. – The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of a new gene therapy, **Kymriah**, also known as CTL109 or tisagenlecleucel, for one of the most common and lethal forms of cancer in children and young adults -- acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL. OHSU Doernbecher Children’s Hospital, in Portland, Oregon, is the first hospital in the Pacific Northwest – and only one of a handful of certified treatment centers in the nation - to offer this urgently needed therapy.

“It is not uncommon for ALL patients to undergo multiple treatments, including bone marrow transplant, chemotherapy or radiation throughout their medical journey,” said **Eneida Nemecek, M.D., M.S., M.B.A.**, director of the pediatric bone marrow transplantation program at OHSU Doernbecher Children’s Hospital. “Unfortunately, these options are not effective for all patients, and nearly 20 percent of the 3,500 pediatric and adolescent patients diagnosed with ALL every year in the United States relapse or don’t respond to these conventional treatments.”

Kymriah, the first gene transfer therapy available in the U.S., is manufactured and marketed by Novartis. It uses chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy, a form of immunotherapy in which the patient’s own blood cells are collected, genetically engineered to attack B-cell leukemia cells, then infused back into the patient.

In a recent clinical trial, a single dose of Kymriah resulted in 83 percent of participants becoming cancer-free after three months. This innovative therapy is now approved for the treatment of children, adolescents and young adults up to age 25 with B-cell precursor ALL that is refractory to treatment or in second or later relapse.

Nemecek, a clinical researcher with the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute and an endowed professor of pediatrics and medical oncology in the OHSU School of Medicine, was one of the principal investigators for the CTL109 clinical trial that led to approval of the drug.

“The results of the phase 2 CTL109 studies were incredible, with many patients achieving sustained remission of their leukemia. The FDA approval of this novel therapy will help usher in a new era of personalized immunotherapy treatment for patients, allowing OHSU to expand its already successful pediatric and adolescent cancer care to patients in need, across our region and beyond.”

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OHSU Doernbecher Children's Hospital ranks among the nation's **Best Children's Hospitals**. It's physicians, nurses and healthcare staff provide a full range of specialty and subspecialty care to tens of thousands of children annually, resulting in 200,000 discharges, surgeries, transports and outpatient visits annually in a patient- and family-centered environment. OHSU Doernbecher providers also travel throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington, providing specialty care to more than 3,000 children at more than 200 outreach clinics in 15 locations. Using state-of-the-art, secure two-way video and audio communication, **OHSU Doernbecher's Telemedicine Network** connects pediatric specialists to physicians statewide to help evaluate time-critical pediatric patient needs and assist with treatment plans.

About the Knight Cancer Institute

The **Knight Cancer Institute** at Oregon Health & Science University is a pioneer in the field of precision cancer medicine. The institute's director, Brian Druker, M.D., helped prove it was possible to shut down just the cells that enable cancer to grow. This breakthrough has made once-fatal forms of the disease manageable and transformed how cancer is treated. The OHSU Knight Cancer Institute is the only National Cancer Institute designated Comprehensive Cancer Center between Sacramento and Seattle – an honor earned only by the nation's top cancer centers. It is headquarters to one of the National Cancer Institute's largest research collaboratives, the Southwest Oncology Group, in addition to offering the latest treatments and technologies and hundreds of research studies and clinical trials. For additional information on the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute visit www.ohsu.edu/xd/health/services/cancer or follow us on **Facebook** and **Twitter**.