Drug offers new hope to fight relapse in people with kidney cancer

We often think of cancer as a one-time event, but recurrence after treatment is common in many cancers and patients often face limited clinical options. Approximately 300,000 people worldwide are diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma each year, and of the 16 percent of patients diagnosed with stage III or localized type of the disease, almost half will relapse following surgery and develop metastases.

Sunitinib (marketed as Sutent) a drug that has already proven highly effective as first-line treatment for people with metastatic renal cell carcinoma, was recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to also treat patients with the disease who are at high risk for tumor recurrence.

Dr. Allan Pantuck is a professor of urology at the David Geffen School of Medicine, Director of Translational Research for the UCLA Kidney Cancer Program, and head of the UCLA Institute of Urologic Oncology’s Clinical Research Program. He served on the Global Advisory Steering Committee that oversaw the conduct and progress of a clinical study of sunitinib and helped to present these findings to the FDA’s Oncologic Drugs Advisory Committee, leading to the drug’s approval.

He can discuss the scientific research regarding the effectiveness of sunitinib in treating renal cell carcinoma and in comparison to traditional strategies that have not proven successful, such as radiotherapy and hormone therapy. He can also address how relapse risk can be assessed using the UCLA Integrated Staging System (UISS) developed at UCLA.

“Kidney cancer is a deadly disease, and while the prognosis for metastatic renal cell carcinoma has improved in the past decade, if the cancer returns survival is usually measured in months,” said Dr. Pantuck. “The FDA approval of sunitinib is testament to its potential as a powerful new treatment option, and offers hope for patients and their loved ones.”

Dr. Pantuck recently co-authored a landmark study published in the New England Journal of Medicine that showed for the first time how sunitinib can improve disease-free survival in patients who are at high risk for tumor recurrence as determined by UISS. Board certified in urology, he specializes in gene and immune therapies for genitourinary cancer, molecular and genomic characterizations of kidney cancer, and the nutritional aspects of bladder and prostate cancer prevention and treatment.