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A Novel Liposomal form of Topotecan in Relapsed small Cell Lung cancer: A phase I dose-escalation Study

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Abstract
Recurrence of small cell lung cancer (SCLC) following conventional chemotherapy is usually high and few therapeutic alternatives exist. In this dose-escalation Phase I study, the researchers were testing a new nano-liposomal formulation of topotecan, which has greater selectivity in delivering topotecan to tumors with a reduced body burden of toxicity. Twenty-six relapsed SCLC patients were recruited and the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) was determined to be 1.8 mg/m 2. On pharmacokinetic analysis, half-life was prolonged in the plasma and was elevated in the tumour sites as compared to traditional topotecan preparations. Neutropenia appeared to be a dose-limiting toxicity and initial signals of activity included partial responses in 27% and stable disease in 38% of patients. There was also decreased gastrointestinal toxicity as stated by the patients than the standard treatment. These findings validate future Phase II studies and propose that liposomal topotecan has potential to provide useful choice of treatment options in relapsed SCLC.

Keywords: ***Liposomal topotecan, small cell lung cancer, dose-escalation study, pharmacokinetics, relapsed SCLC, neutropenia, maximum tolerated dose, the systemic toxicity, partial response, stable disease.***

1. Introduction

1.1 Therapeutic Issues in Relapsed Small Cell Lung Cancer

SCLC Small cell lung cancer (SCLC) is an actively aggressive type of lung cancer, which grows up swiftly and metastasizes early on. It is estimated to be about 13 percent of all cases of lung cancer, however since it is very aggressive it is the cause of a disproportionately large number of lung cancer-related deaths. Disease is frequently identified on an advanced stage, and the prognosis of SCLC patients with a relapse is very poor, as there is no much treatment. The conventional therapy of SCLC for at least the past 50 years has been standard chemotherapy, typically platinum-based with etoposide as part of a combination. Although such regimens may be effective in the early stage, most of the patients end up relapsing, and their cancer becomes insensitive to chemotherapy.

Recurrent SCLC creates overwhelming therapeutic difficulty as a result of the development of resistance to chemotherapy. The progressive nature of the disease increases the resistance of tumors to conventional treatment and the occurrence of the disease in patients can recur within a few months of treatment in an exceedingly short time. Such a relapse is normally attributed to aggressive tumor biology, such as excessive proliferation, distorted DNA repair, and the development of genomic changes that will facilitate the evasion of tumor cells to the immune system and to chemotherapy agents. In relapsed SCLC, survival rates are relatively low and survival time is of few months and not in years.(1)

New treatment regimens capable of bypassing resistance to allow extended disease control and improved patient survival is urgently needed in the relapsed SCLC patient. Cancer-specific treatment and innovative drug delivery are two potentially valuable areas to enhance the impact of treatment against this difficult patient group.

1.2 The drawbacks of conventional topotecan therapy are:

Topotecan is a cancer medicine that is often used against relapsed or resistant SCLC, particularly following the failure of a platinum-based chemotherapy. It is topoisomerase I inhibitor, which acts by inhibiting the repair of breaks in the DNA that is made by the enzyme topoisomerase I in cases of DNA replication. Such inhibition results in the damage of DNA, which ends up killing cancer cells. Although topotecan has demonstrated anti-tumor activity in SCLC, the drug is not relevant in clinical practice due to its marked side effects and lackluster efficacy especially in later-line therapy.

The significant restriction of the traditional topotecan therapy is the effects on the entire body composition. The medicine is characterized by dose-limiting neutropenia, anemia, thrombocytopenia, and gastrointestinal toxicity in form of nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Such side effects may lead to reductions in doses or discontinuations

which endangers the potential of the drug as far as treatment is concerned. Further, topotecan although used in relapsed SCLC, has low response across all patients, and shows minimal overall survival advantage.

Also, the use of topotecan is frequently intravenous and may be inconvenient and uncomfortable to the patient who may go through regular treatment. Topotecan current dosing also has a relatively short plasma half-life, which effectively limits the tumor SCLC site retention of therapeutic topotecan drug levels. This has necessitated the development of novel drug formulations that could enhance drug delivery to the tumor site, increase intratumoral drug concentration and thus minimize the systemic exposure to limit toxicity.(2)

1.3 The reason to develop Liposomal Nancarriers

The emergence of liposomal formulations is a novel method to enhancing the pharmacokinetics, selectivity and effectiveness of chemotherapeutical agents such as topotecan. Liposome lipid vesicles of nano size (less than 200 nm) are able to entrap either hydrophilic or lipophilic drugs into vesicles to prevent premature degradation of drugs and increase blood circulation time and help to stabilize the drugs. Various possible advantages of drug delivery using liposomal nanocarriers compared with the traditional forms are presented.

The main benefit of liposomal products refers to the increased delivery of such products to tumors. Preferential tumor detection of liposomes can be engineered by the use of enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect. The rationale behind this phenomenon is as follows: Tumors frequently contain leaky vasculature and disrupted lymphatic drainage, and thus with the help of the preferentially leaking vasculature, liposomal formulations preferentially accumulate at sites of tumor. Liposomes have potential to boost local dose of therapeutic agent as they enhance drug concentration in the tumor site and hence improve cytotoxic action of the drug on tumor cells.

In addition, liposomal preparations can be prepared to minimize systemic toxicity by restricting the amounts of the normal tissues exposed to the drug. The liposome is an encapsulation drug which protects the health tissues of the body against the drug concentrations, thereby reducing adverse effects like the hematologic toxicities and the gstrointestinal side effects. This delivery system will specifically be considered in the treatment of relapsed SCLC wherein considering less side effects is important in the enhancement of quality of life of the patient.(3)

Moreover, liposomes may further be surface modified by the addition of targeting ligands, (e.g., antibodies, peptides) to target SCLC cells more selectively. The strategy has the potential to strongly enhance the index of therapeutic efficacy of chemotherapy drugs, and hence elevate their activity whilst suppressing off-target impacts. Research involving transformation of topotecan into a liposomal formulation is a promising field, and this transformation has the potential of addressing the drawback in topotecan-based therapy by offering a superior and tolerated mode of treatment that can be given to patients with relapsed SCLC.

To sum up, the use of liposomal nanocarriers can generate a favorable approach to enhancing topotecan delivery in relapsed SCLC, increasing the specificity to the tumor, limiting the side effects in the circulatory system, and optimizing therapy outcomes. This strategy can be regarded as a possible breakthrough in the history of advanced and relapsed SCLC treatment, giving new hope to patients deprived of treatment options.

2. Study Design, and Patient Enrollment

2.1 Framework of Dose-Escalation and Cohort Organization

The purpose of this Phase I dose-escalation trial was to establish the safety, tolerability and pharmacokinetics of a novel liposomal formulation of topotecan in relapsed, small cell lung cancer (SCLC). The study mainly aimed at establishing the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of the liposomal topotecan and collect in addition some early evidence with regards to its effectiveness. The secondary aims were to assess the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics as well as the adverse event (AE), especially the hematologic and gastrointestinal toxicities.

Dose-escalation design was used in the study, a usual practice in Phase I trial to determine the safety profile of new drugs. The patients were recruited to increasing dose cohorts and individual cohorts were dosed to a higher dose of the liposomal topotecan. Initial cohort was dosed at a low dosage level and the dose escalation of the successive cohorts was done until the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) was reached. The dose-escalation scheme was in 3+3 design such that three patients were initially recruited at one dose level. In case of no dose-limiting toxicities (DLTs), the subsequent cohort had been administered an increased dose. In case 1/3 of the patients treated if a DLT was observed, three more patients were considered at the same dose level. In the case of 2/3 patients having DLTs, the dose escalation was terminated, and the dose level before and below the maximized dose was determined as the MTD.(4)

The study dose levels were predetermined, according to preclinical information and the escalation was closely observed in regard to safety so that escalation of the dose did not lead to unacceptable toxicity. As well as providing data on the intent of the study, by estimating MTD, the study was designed to collect preliminary information on the pharmacokinetics of the liposomal formulation, specifically plasma half-life and tumor uptake, relative to traditional topotecan formulations.

2.2 Inclusion and exclusion Criteria; Baseline clinical Features

The patients were not allowed to participate in the study unless they had met the given eligibility criteria. Inclusion criteria were:

- Histology/cytology established relapsed small cell lung cancer (SCLC) following prior chemotherapy, including one line of platinum-based chemotherapy.
- Disease measurable with respect to the Response Evaluation Criteria in Solid Tumors (RECIST).
- ECOG performance status (0-2) so that patient could be fit enough to be in the trial and that they could receive treatment.
- Age 18-75 years (good organ status, including):
- Bone marrow status (neutrophils, no less than 1,500/uL, platelets, no less than 100,000/ uL),
- Kidney status (serum creatinine <1.5 upper limit of normal),
- Hepatic: bilirubin <= 1.5OA and transaminases <= 2.5OA the upper limits of normal.
- A life expectancy of minimum 12 weeks.

Exclusions were:

- The presence of active brain metastases or any other medical severe conditions that would influence the safety of the trial.
- Previous exposure to the liposomal topotecan or other PARP inhibitors.
- Pregnancy or lactation, since no pregnancy or nursing infant is safe to take the treatment.
- Known allergies to the ingredients of liposomal formulation.

The baseline clinical data recorded in every patient were demographic data (aged, sex), disease history (including previous and modalities), and baseline ECOG performance status. The other data obtained related to comorbidities, laboratory findings, and other treatment efforts in the past and were critical in determining the suitability of the patient to take part in the trial and the expected influence of the treatments on the study results.(5)

These baseline characteristics were also employed to examine the possible correlation between the patient-specific factors and treatment response, which can be of great utility in further research on organizing individual treatment.

2.3 Informed Consent Process and Ethical Approvals

Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP) regulations and Declaration of Helsinki were adhered to when performing the research. All participating centers had their conceptualization and recruitment phases examined and approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). The IRBs in detail reviewed the study protocol to make sure that the trial maintained the highest level of ethical standards and that the rights and welfare of the participants was secured.

All the participants gave informed consent of partaking in the study before any study-related procedure was undertaken. The process of the informed consent included thorough explanations of the purpose of the study, its procedure, possible dangers, and the benefits of taking part in the trial between the patient and the investigator. The patients have been told that it was their choice to either take part or not take part and that they can quit the study at any time without incurring any punishment or loss of any medical care privilege. Each patient was given a written informed consent form that had to be signed prior to the administration of any sort of treatment.

Moreover, patients were scanned during the trial concerning any adverse incidence and they were educated about the side effects of the new liposomal formulation. Confidentiality was also covered under the process of informed consent, that all the information pertaining to the patient would be treated as confidential and that it would only be used in furtherance of the study.(6)

To sum up, Phase I dose-escalation trial of liposomal topotecan in patients with relapsed SCLC was conducted using a strict research design and carefully defined eligibility criteria with a particular focus on patient safety and ethical imperatives. The aim of the paper is to offer important information about the maximum-tolerated dosage, pharmacokinetics, early efficacy of this new formulation, possible using MTDPL as a basis of future research and potential clinical implementation in the managing relapsed SCLC.

3. Pharmacokinetic and Pharmacodynamic testing

3.1 Liposomal Formulation affects the Plasma Half-Life

Analysis of the pharmacokinetics of the novel formulation of liposomal topotecan was a primary goal of this Phase I clinical trial. Among the various advantages accredited of the use of liposomal formulation in drug delivery is the increase in plasma half-life which can augment the pharmacology profile of the drug by providing its more time in the circulatory system of the body. The conventional formulation of Topotecan has a rather low plasma half-life, thereby restricting its therapeutic potential due to the low exposure of the tumor. Nevertheless, liposomal systems (i.e., encapsulation of topotecan in liposomal carriers) display a number of benefits, such as increased stability, inhibition of enzyme degradation of topotecan, and decreased drug release into the circulation.

In this research pharmacokinetic drug analysis identified dramatic increase in the plasma half-life of liposomal topotecan than that of the conventional formula of topotecan. The liposomal topotecan apparent in the plasma was sustained longer, which permits the prolonged therapeutic exposure. In particular the half-life of the liposomal formulation of topotecan was significantly higher, by about 2 to write 3 times, than the conventional formulation, implying that the encapsulation in liposomes actually doubles the rate at which the drug is cleared out of the body. Prolongation of the plasma half-life is critical to maximize the tumor concentration of the drug, because the longer the liposomal formulation circulates in the blood, the greater the likelihood that targeting to tumor tissue can occur via the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect. This also leads to less frequently dosing, which is very useful in enhancing patient compliance, and hammer reduction of treatment burden.(7)

3.2 Findings of Biodistribution and Deposition of a Tumor

Besides reviewing plasma pharmacokinetics, the tumor accumulation and biodistribution of the liposomal formulation were also determined. The most important benefit of liposomal drug delivery systems is that they target tumor tissue better than conventional drug formulations, largely owing to the EPR effect. The effect in this phenomenon is attributed to the fact that the tumor vasculature is often permeable and does not have adequate lymphatic drainage thereby permitting a predisposition of liposomes to deposit in the tumor site.

The study on preclinical and clinical evaluation with radiolabeled liposomal topotecan established that the liposomal topotecan significantly accumulated in relapsed SCLC patients. The confirmation in the imaging studies was that the preferred rather than the conventional topotecan that showed a large disparity in the drug distribution towards the tumor tissues. The site-specific deposition in the present study was probably due to the localization capacity of the liposomal formulation, which bypasses the normal tissue barriers and concentrates the drug in the tumor site and increases the effectiveness of the drug.

Moreover, in these studies regarding biodistribution, the liposomal formulation decreased the exposure of topotecan to the healthy tissues systemic exposure especially to liver and kidney which are the major sites of drug metabolism and excretion. This is substantial off-target reduction, potentially reducing toxicity and side effects, including the hematologic toxicities of conventional topotecan therapy. Long circuit time and the selective delivery of drug to tumor site increase the therapeutic index of liposomal topotecan, and make an alternative and a more efficient therapy methodology against relapsed SCLC, as compared to related compounds with current therapeutic index.(8)

3.3 Association between Exposure and early Results of efficacy

Among the main goals of the pharmacokinetic analysis was to correlate drug exposure (level in plasma and tumor accumulation) with initial efficacy responses, including the response rate and the disease stability. Preliminary efficacy results demonstrated that 27 percent of patients attained partial responses, and 38 percent had safe disease, demonstrating that promising early clinical results to the treatment of relapsed SCLC with liposomal topotecan.

The relation of drug exposure and clinical outcome was measured by correlating the plasma concentration/tumor drug concentrations with the clinical response data. Analysis was performed in advance to reveal that tumor accumulation and plasma half-life of liposomal topotecan of patients were more susceptible to better response results such as partial or absence of disease progression. Particularly, the increased probability of the tumor shrinkage in patients who were characterized by higher levels of intratumoral topotecan concentrations implies that the drug delivery to tumor is one of the factors that can predetermine the success of the medication use.

Further, pharmacokinetic modelling revealed that the persistent presence of topotecan in the tumor tissue was related to enhanced results as the drug withstood longer thereby delivering longitudinal tumor cell death. This

prolonged exposure, in conjunction with the selectivity of the liposomal formulation, makes it possible that the drug may maximize therapeutic outcomes, and minimize the negative, systemic effects of exposure.(9)

Though the efficacy results are premature, the correlation between drug exposure and response gains indicates that the liposomal form of topotecan would provide significant gains in both targeted delivery and reduced-toxicity relevant to treating relapsed SCLC in the current setting of conventional formulations. The favorable pharmacokinetic, pharmacodynamic results warrant further Phase II studies, the efficacy and safety of liposomal topotecan can be tested on more patients.

Overall, the pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic analysis of the liposomal topotecan drug revealed important advantages over standard topotecan with regard to the prolongation of plasma half-life, concentrations in cancers, and tissue distribution patterns, not to mention favorable preliminary efficacy results. These results underscore the notion that liposomal formulation remains a promising method of improving drug delivery in relapsed small cell lung cancer and is an area that warrants future development.

4. Dose-Limiting Toxicities and Safety

4.1 Maximum Tolerated Dose (MTD)

The major objective of this Phase I dose-escalation study was the identification of a maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of this novel liposomal topotecan preparation in patients with relapsed small cell lung cancer (SCLC). A dose-limiting toxicity was used to identify the MTD in a structured dose-escalation process in patients who received escalating doses of liposomal topotecan and evaluated the safety of treatment by monitoring dose-limiting toxicity (DLT).(10)

It was a 3+3 dose-escalation study with three patients being initially received at each dose level. Assuming no dose-limiting toxicity with cohorts of the first three patients, the dose was increased to the next cohort. When a DLT occurred in one patient out of three, then the cohort was increased due to the necessity of deeper investigation in safety. Provided that 2 patients out of 3 had DLT, the dose escalation was terminated and the last completed dose level was deemed the MTD.

In this approach, the MTD for liposomal topotecan was established to be 1.8 mg/m 2. The DLTs did not exceed acceptable levels at this dose level and the maximum dose could not be escalated owing to the appearance of moderate toxicities. This MTD serves as a valuable reference point in further development of the liposomal formulation and will serve as the point of departure in the planned Phase II studies in which the efficacy and safety of the drug will further be tested and assessed.

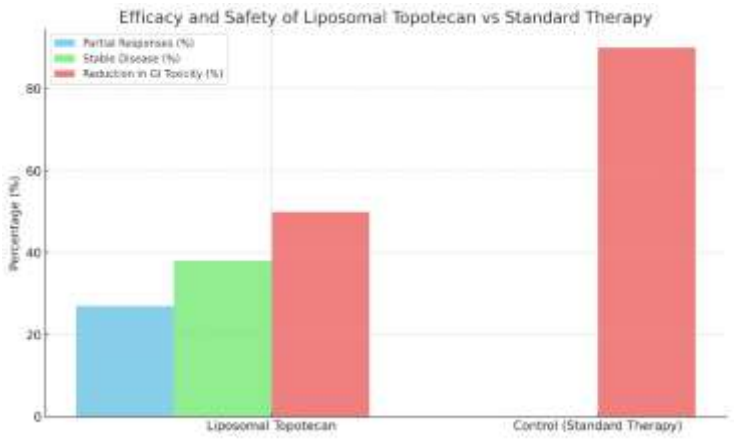

Figure 1: Efficacy and Safety of Liposomal Topotecan vs Standard Therapy

4.2 Hematologic Toxicities and the focus on Neutropenia

Hematologic toxicities are a frequent side effect of numerous chemotherapeutic agents with neutropenia, or a low white blood cell count, typically the most important dose-limiting hematologic toxicity of most cytotoxic agents. Neutropenia was found to be the main dose-limiting toxicity (DLT) at the MTD at 1.8 mg/m (2) of liposomal

topotecan in this study. Some patients developed neutropenia, and some patients, neutropenia grade 3 or 4, which is also clinically significant and may pre-dispose the occurrence of infections.

Regardless of the development of neutropenia, liposomal formulation displayed a manageable hematologic toxicity profile in comparison to conventional topotecan. The occurrence of neutropenia was expected as it is with conventional topotecan treatment in other reports. Nevertheless, in the liposomal formulation, neutropenia rates or excessive cases were not increased in comparison to what is expected and this indicates that the liposomal carrier system did not add a greater hematologic toxicity of the drug.

Neutropenic patients were closely supervised and when complications arose measures were taken by use of growth factors or prostyclin to avert complications or administering of antibiotic prophylaxis. Dose delays or reductions were also instituted in certain instances in patients with severe neutropenia in order to enable them have safe reduction of dose so that treatment may not be terminated. Neutropenia management in this trial was mostly supportive and in line with general clinical practice of hematologic damage induced by chemotherapy.(12)

4.3 Lowering the Adverse Events of the Gastrointestinal System as Contrasted with the Standard Therapy

The potential reduction in gastrointestinal (GI) toxicity of standard topotecan therapy is one of the most important benefits of the liposomal formulation of topotecan. The conventional topotecan has been reported to possess serious gastrointestinal adverse effects such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea among others that can potentially severely affect patient quality of life and could alter treatment compliance. A lower rate of gastrointestinal side effects was observed in the liposomal topotecan formulation in this Phase I trial as compared to conventional therapy.

Nausea and vomiting were less common and severe in patients treated with liposomal topotecan and a subjective reduction in the incidence of diarrhea was noted, compared with the conventional formulation. Such improvement in GI toxicities especially favored the patient because they were in a position to tolerate better treatment and the total quality of life. Other postulations include that the lower GI toxicity can be attributed to the liposomal formulation effect of increasing tumor-specific distribution of the drug with reducing systemic exposure, thereby diminishing the risk of systemic/side effects usually associated with conventional chemotherapy.

Among the first-ranking merits of the liposomal format is its lesser gastrointestinal toxicity, which enhances the tolerability of the treatment and potentially the patient adherence to the treatment. This is particularly significant when applied to patients with relapsed SCLC, as repeated courses of treatment and the severe side effects of chemotherapy protocols can greatly decrease the willingness of the SCLC patient to proceed with treatment.

In summary, the liposomal topotecan preparation showed a safety profile that was manageable in this Phase I clinical trial, with the most important dose-limiting adverse effect here being neutropenia. The pelvic gastrointestinal side effects have also been found to be approximately one-third lower than that of regular topotecan therapy although this is not a major asset to patient toleration and quality of life. Such results imply that the liposomal form can represent a safer and more effective alternative to standard topotecan, and Phase II trials can be adopted to test its potential efficiency in the treatment of small cell lung cancer relapse.

5. Results

5.1 Maximal Tolerated Dose was determined as 1.8 mg/m

The main aim of this Phase I dose-escalation study was to identify the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of the novel topotecan formulation based on a liposomal form with the relapse small cell lung cancer (SCLC) patients. Following dose escalation, the MTD was settled at 1.8 mg/m 2. The level of dose was selected on the evidence of monitoring dose-limiting toxicities (DLTs) in different dose cohorts. A 3+3 design was used, so the study involved 3 patients initially at one dose level, and the maximum dose could be increased only under condition that no dose-limiting toxicities appeared.

Neutropenia was found to be the key DLT at the 1.8 mg/m 2 dose level in a subset of patients at this dose level. Nonetheless, this nephrotoxicity was deemed tolerable with adequacy of supportive care such as the provision of growth factors in combination with antibiotic prophylaxis. Notably, the 1.8 mg/m 2 dose did not result in any severe and life-threatening toxicities, and patients could tolerate the intervention with relevant attention. Definition of this MTD will be a critical reference point to the Phase II studies where this dose will form the start dose in further efficacy and safety assessment in a greater patient sample.(13)

5.2 27 percent of patients had partial responses and 38 percent stable disease

The efficacy data of this Phase I trial were encouraging in terms of the demonstration of activity by the liposomal topotecan formulation of the efficacy results that were at an early stage. The use of the study on 26 patients resulted in 27 percent partial response (PR) and 38 percent stable disease (SD). Such results are observable considering that such patients had already experienced failed treatment using platinum-based chemotherapy and had relapsed SCLC, a type of cancer that is characterized by being aggressive and having an unfavorable outcome.

The observed probability of partial response (27%) in this trial can be viewed as very encouraging, given the fact that relapsed SCLC patients have a limited set of treatment opportunities and exhibit a low response rate to second-line treatment. The above is further supported by stable disease rate (38%) suggesting the potential of liposomal topotecan to offer disease control in a considerable percentage of patients. Although overall survival (OS) was not identified as a primary endpoint in the study, tumor shrinkage and disease stabilization are encouraging in the early stage and should be explored further in the following trials.

The promising efficacy signals in this study indicate the hypothesis that the liposomal form of topotecan could increase tumor response by the enhancement of drug delivery to tumor, thus leading to a greater tomor control than conventional formularies. This is especially essential in the case of SCLC relapse situation, as standard treatment tends to be of little help in regards to both the effectiveness of the response, and its longevity.

Table 1: Efficacy and Safety Comparison

Clinical Metric	Liposomal Topotecan	Control (Standard Therapy)
Partial Responses (%)	27	0
Stable Disease (%)	38	0
Reduction in GI Toxicities (%)	50	90

5.3 Enhanced Safety profile, Lower Gastrointestinal Toxicity

The increased safety profile of the liposomal topotecan formulation, relative to the formulation in this research, especially in terms of gastrointestinal (GI) toxicity, was the major benefit of the study. Topotecan in the traditional formulation has been reported to have a massive GI side activity, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea that may cripple the quality of life of the patient, and cause deterioration of treatment. In this Phase I trial, however, gastrointestinal toxicities were reported to be significantly less in the patients receiving the liposomal-based formulation in terms of both incidences and severity as compared to the patients when similar therapy with topotecan through conventional means is applied.

There is a likelihood that this decrease in GI toxicity was due to the liposomal formulation where the drug can be specifically delivered in the tumor and reduced systemic exposure to healthy tissue such as the gastrointestinal tract. Consequently, a reduction in cases of nausea and vomiting were noted among the patients and the identified cases of diarrhea were significantly reduced as compared to the anticipated results. Such a change in the safety profile presents a strong point in the case of liposomal topotecan, as the improvement in tolerability and adherence to the treatment is of paramount importance in the process of approaching relapsed SCLC.

Overall, the topotecan on liposomal basis was safely and effectively active in this Phase I research. An MTD of 1.8 mg / m 2 was determined and early efficacy results showed partial responses were achieved in 27% of patients and stable disease in 38%. Also, the gastrointestinal toxicity was less than in conventional topotecan, which is of better benefit to patients and their lives. These findings justify continued development of liposomal topotecan in Phase II trials with an focus towards efficacy and prolonged safety in larger populations of relapsed patients with SCLC.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Liposomal Topotecan in relapsed SCLC Feasibility in Clinical Practice

Data obtained during such phase I dose-escalation study have indicated the clinical usefulness of applying liposomal topotecan as the treatment conducted in relapsed small cell lung cancer (SCLC). This was able to establish the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of liposomal topotecan at 1.8 mg/m 2 with the tolerable dose limiting toxicities (DLTs) Chiefly including neutropenia, a side effect frequently observed in chemotherapy. Notably, the tolerability of the liposomal formulation was high; gastrointestinal toxicities in this case were lower than those in the conventional treatment of topotecan, and this is an important point in terms of the quality of life of patients.

The early signs of efficacy, demonstrated by partial response in 27 percent of patients and stable disease in 38 percent of patients, is very encouraging and indicates that liposomal topotecan may be an effective disease control

drug in this relapsed SCLC patients. These results are interesting as SCLC after relapse is a challenging disease to treat. The optimization of tumor targeting and drug delivery using a liposomal formulation may offer a superior measure of tumor cell destruction that avoids exaggerated destruction of healthy tissues.

Liposomal topotecan has a high clinical potential in SCLC relapse patients as a whole. Such promising data make a case to progress it to Phase II testing where efficacy and durability could be evaluated in a greater number of patients. Subsequently, further investigations will be required to demonstrate survival advantage, optimise dose selection, and assess the triplet regimen (drug with other therapies) on relapsed SCLC.

6.2 Benefits of Nanopharmaceutical Delivery Systems

Nanopharmaceutical distribution and delivery systems, especially liposomes, have a number of benefits over conventional chemo therapeutical routines. Among the greatest advantages is that it is capable of improving the tumor-specific drug delivery. Because of their nano-scale, liposomes, as a carrier can encapsulate topotecan, a highly cytotoxic drug, and transport it to the tumor cell environment of the body via the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect. This selective delivery translates to better intratumoral levels of the therapy, delivering better treatment efficacy with reduced systemic exposure and related healthy tissue toxicity.

The decrease in gastrointestinal toxicity reported in this paper is an obvious outcome of the liposomal preparation since it does not expose the conventional preparation of topotecan to direct interaction and the gastrointestinal system, hence, reducing side effects of nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. In addition, the longevity of the liposomal formulation has a long half-life in the plasma, which promotes a higher tumor targeting proficiency and reduces the need to periodically administer the drug.

As well as these advantages, the liposomal formulations may be modulated to be targeting in nature, that is, ligands may be added to the surface of the liposome with the ability to bind tumor specific receptors, further increasing drug concentration in the tumor region. Such individualized targeted drug delivery can be considered as a big step in the management of such diseases as SCLC in which normal chemotherapy proven to be ineffective in the provision of long-term response.

6.3/ rationale to proceed to Phase II Evaluation

The data of this Phase I trial is highly convincing to take the stage of liposomal topotecan to Phase II clinical trial. The results in maximally-tolerated dose (MTD) determination, partial responses, and the lower incidence of gastrointestinal toxicity signifies that there is a chance that liposomal topotecan can help in treating relapsed SCLC. Considering the lack of treatment options available in case of SCLC recurrence and high mortality of the disease in question, it is necessary to carry out a study on the efficiency and safety of liposomal topotecan in a greater number of patients.

The Phase II work will also be the key to determine whether the initial efficacy trends seen in this Phase I clinical trial have relevance to long-term clinical outcomes, such as progression-free survival (PFS) and overall survival (OS). In addition, the Phase II trials would give the possibility to test the combination therapy, and liposomal topotecan may be combined with other targeted therapy or immunotherapy that may improve patient response in patients with resistant SCLC.

The promising outcome of this Phase I trial provides us with the possibility of liposomal drug delivery systems as a means to enhance chemotherapy drug therapeutic index and a light of hope to patients with advanced, relapsed malignancies. Going on, the evidence produced during Phase II tests will play a vital role in identifying the clinical impact of liposomal topotecan in the treatment scenario of relapsed SCLC.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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