



Original Article

Autologous hematopoietic progenitor cell mobilization and collection in adult patients presenting with multiple myeloma and lymphoma: A position-statement from the Turkish Society of Apheresis (TSA)



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ABSTRACT

Autologous hematopoietic cell transplantation (AHCT) is a routinely used procedure in the treatment of adult patients presenting with multiple myeloma (MM), Hodgkin lymphoma (HL) and various subtypes of non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) in upfront and relapsed/refractory settings. Successful hematopoietic progenitor cell mobilization (HPCM) and collection are the rate limiting first steps for application of AHCT. In 2015, almost 1700 AHCT procedures have been performed for MM, HL and NHL in Turkey. Although there are recently published consensus guidelines addressing critical issues regarding autologous HPCM, there is a tremendous heterogeneity in terms of mobilization strategies of transplant centers across the world. In order to pave the way to a more standardized HPCM approach in Turkey, Turkish Society of Apheresis (TSA) assembled a working group consisting of experts in the field. Here we report the position statement of TSA regarding autologous HPCM mobilization strategies in adult patients presenting with MM and lymphoma.

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1. Introduction

Autologous hematopoietic cell transplantation (AHCT) is a routinely used procedure in the treatment of adult patients presenting with multiple myeloma (MM), Hodgkin lymphoma (HL) and various subtypes of non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) in upfront and relapsed/refractory settings [1,2]. On the other hand the application of second AHCT is recommended in MM patients with high-risk

cytogenetic features as part of a tandem approach [3] or relapsed disease following a reasonable duration (>18 months) of initial remission following upfront AHCT [4]. There is a global shift from bone marrow to peripheral blood (PB) as the preferred source of CD34⁺ hematopoietic progenitor cells because faster engraftment kinetics and better quality of life compared to bone marrow harvesting.

Successful hematopoietic progenitor cell mobilization (HPCM) and collection are the rate limiting first steps for application of AHCT. Although there are recently published consensus guidelines addressing critical issues regarding autologous HPCM [5–8], there is a tremendous heterogeneity in terms of mobilization strategies

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of transplant centers across the world. Mobilization policies of centers depend not only on institutional perception of up-to-date data regarding HPCM or preference of a specific guideline-driven strategy but also on resource availability and local regulations of each country, where the center is located. In order to pave the way to a more standardized HPCM approach in Turkey, Turkish Society of Apheresis (TSA) assembled a working group consisting of experts in the field. Here we report the position statement of TSA regarding autologous HPCM mobilization strategies in adult patients presenting with MM and lymphoma.

2. Methods

TSA established a working group consisting of experts in the field of adult clinical hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT). The position statement included frequently asked questions, relevant issues regarding HPCM and organized in a user-friendly way for transplant physicians. A core panel of experts prepared a draft including most current data and local regulations in Turkey regarding HPCM, which was thoroughly evaluated by all members of the working group to finalize the manuscript.

3. Position statement

3.1. The choice and schedule of the myeloid growth factors

Original filgrastim (Neupogen®) with its various biosimilars and lenograstim (Granocyte®) are currently available in Turkish market. Although we have robust data indicating similarity in terms of efficacy and safety of pegylated G-CSF compared to non-pegylated G-CSF [9], pegylated G-CSF is not licensed yet in the country. Equivalence of biosimilar filgrastim as originator G-CSF or lenograstim in terms of safety and efficacy has been reported in steady-state [10–15], chemomobilization [16–21] and G-CSF + plerixafor HPCM [22] settings in patients who underwent autologous HCT and healthy donors of allogeneic HCT recipients. All available G-CSFs (original/biosimilar filgrastim and lenograstim) can be used in approved doses and schedules for steady-state (10 µg/kg/day subcutaneously) and chemomobilization (5 µg/kg/day subcutaneously) as recommended by guidelines [8].

Although widely used, one study conducted in breast cancer patients found no advantage of split dose injection of filgrastim over once daily schedule [23]. Because of cost savings compared to lenograstim, original or biosimilar filgrastim seems to be the most feasible agent for steady-state HPCM in Turkey.

3.1.1. Position statement on the choice and schedule of the myeloid growth factors

Original filgrastim, biosimilar forms of filgrastim and lenograstim in recommended doses and schedules are reasonable G-CSF options for steady-state mobilization and chemomobilization in patients undergoing HPCM. Original or biosimilar filgrastim may be preferred over lenograstim because of cost-effectivity.

3.2. Progenitor cell dose and duration of leukapheresis

There is general agreement that infusion of at least 2×10^6 /kg CD34⁺ cells are needed for successful engraftment, although restoration of normal hematopoiesis is possible below this threshold [7]. Because the infusion of higher dose of progenitor cells result in faster engraftment and decreased transfusion support, optimal dose of CD34⁺ cells needed to support one AHCT were accepted as $>4 \times 10^6$ /kg [24] or $>5 \times 10^6$ /kg [7,25–27]. There are also centers using disease-specific targets for CD34⁺ cells ($>4 \times 10^6$ /kg for MM

and $>5 \times 10^6$ /kg for lymphoma patients required for supporting one AHCT) [28]. In fact, two phase-III trials, which resulted the approval of plerixafor in combination with G-CSF for HPCM in patients with MM and NHL defined achievement of $>6 \times 10^6$ /kg and $>5 \times 10^6$ /kg CD34⁺ cells as the primary end point for target stem cell yield in patients presenting MM and NHL, respectively [29,30]. Although an evidence-based threshold for optimal stem cell dose cannot be defined at this moment, targeting optimal progenitor cell dose for one AHCT as $4-5 \times 10^6$ /kg seems to be reasonable. Even in the era of novel agents, AHCT is an indispensable treatment option for MM patients in upfront and relapsed/refractory settings. Indeed, many MM patients may need two AHCT procedures during the course of their disease either as a tandem approach (patients with high-risk cytogenetic features at diagnosis) or in relapsed disease with a long remission duration following first AHCT [3,4]. Therefore, achievement of minimal stem cell yield required for supporting two AHCT procedures should be aimed in patients presenting with MM.

Currently, there is no consensus on the maximal duration of leukapheresis. Defining the optimal trade-off between prolonged HPCM procedure and higher progenitor cell yield is an important issue for all transplant centers. It is often difficult to decide whether to stop or continue leukapheresis to reach the optimal cell dose in a patient after achievement of minimal stem cell dose. Italian Group for Stem Cell Transplantation (GITMO) defined proven poor mobilization as inability to harvest at least 2×10^6 /kg CD34⁺ cell dose in ≤ 3 apheresis sessions [31]. With judicious use of plerixafor in almost one third of the patients, City of Hope group was able to collect at least 2×10^6 /kg CD34⁺ cells in 2.8 days (mean) [28]. In the plerixafor era, keeping the duration of progenitor cell collection at a maximum of 4 days seems to be rational [8,29,30,32].

3.2.1. Position statement on the progenitor cell dose and duration of leukapheresis

Collection of at least 2×10^6 /kg CD34⁺ cells is recommended for supporting single AHCT. In patients presenting with MM, the minimal required progenitor cell dose should be 4×10^6 /kg in order to support two AHCT procedures. If feasible, we suggest targeting $4-5 \times 10^6$ /kg CD34⁺ cells for single AHCT in order to achieve faster engraftment and minimize transfusion support following AHCT. Preferentially, apheresis teams should aim to collect minimal and optimal number of CD34⁺ cells in no more than 3 and 4 apheresis sessions, respectively.

3.3. Technical aspects and timing

Peripheral blood CD34⁺ (PBCD34⁺) cell count for initiating of leukapheresis is the single, most predictive parameter for progenitor cell yield [6]. Monitorization of PBCD34⁺ cell count should begin on days 4 or 5 in patients on steady-state or plerixafor + G-CSF mobilization [7,8]. In contrast, predicting the optimal day of leukapheresis in chemomobilization setting may be complicated and vary according the chemomobilization regimen used. A recently published consensus report from United Kingdom suggested expected days of initiating leukapheresis based on chemotherapy regimen used [33]. Monitoring of PBCD34⁺ cell count may be started when white blood cell count (WBC) reach $4-5 \times 10^9$ /L [34]. Estimating the day of leukapheresis based on PBCD34⁺ cell count is the optimal method. Although there is no consensus on the optimal threshold for initiating leukapheresis, minimal levels are 5–20/µL PBCD34⁺ cells [7]. In general, initiating leukapheresis when PBCD34⁺ cell count reached >20 /µL is reasonable in order to achieve at least 2×10^6 /kg CD34⁺ cells in the final product [7,8]. Even in the era of plerixafor, patients with a PBCD34⁺ cell count <5 /µL have a high risk for mobilization failure [24,35]. In recent reports, preemptive plerixafor is suggested for patients

with a PBCD34⁺ cell count 5–10/ μ L [28] or ≤ 15 / μ L [33]. Based on the aforementioned facts, initiation of leukapheresis at 15–20/ μ L PBCD34⁺ cell count seems reasonable, especially where preemptive plerixafor is not an option.

Splenic enlargement is frequently observed in the course of HPCM and splenic rupture is a quite rare but feared complication of patients presenting with hyperleukocytosis. Although evidence-based data is lacking, the common practice is to withhold G-CSF and plerixafor when the WBC exceeds 100×10^9 /L and 75×10^9 /L, respectively [7].

3.3.1. Position statement on technical aspects and timing

Monitorization of PBCD34⁺ cell count is recommended for all patients undergoing HPCM to decide the optimal day of initiation of leukapheresis. Monitorization should begin on days 4 or 5 in patients on steady-state or plerixafor+G-CSF mobilization. In chemomobilization setting, monitorization of PBCD34⁺ cell count may be started when WBC reach $4-5 \times 10^9$ /L. Initiation of leukapheresis at 15–20/ μ L PBCD34⁺ cell count seems reasonable, especially where preemptive plerixafor is not an option. It may be preferred to withhold G-CSF and plerixafor when WBC exceeds 100×10^9 /L and 75×10^9 /L, respectively.

3.4. Risk factors for mobilization failure

Older age (>60), irradiation to pelvis or mediastinum, marrow involvement of the primary disease, prolonged exposure to certain types of chemotherapeutic agents (fludarabine, lenalidomide, melfalan), lymphoma patients who received more than two lines of multiagent chemotherapy, bone marrow cellularity <30% at the time of mobilization, low platelet count ($<100 \times 10^9$ /L) before HPCM are known risk factors for mobilization failure [5,8,28,31]. Although very attractive, identifying poor mobilizers based solely on patient characteristics may be misleading and there is no consensus on a standard risk scoring system predicting mobilization failure. Transplants centers willing to adopt risk-based mobilization strategy may develop their own risk classification or they may prefer using proposed algorithms by experienced centers [28,31]. But in either situation we suggest using written algorithms instead of case-by-case decision making.

3.4.1. Position statement on risk factors for mobilization failure

For transplants centers willing to adopt risk-based mobilization strategy we suggest using written algorithms instead of case-by-case decision making.

3.5. Mobilization strategy

The optimal mobilization strategy in terms of efficacy, safety and cost-effectiveness is yet to be defined. Until the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of plerixafor in 2008, the main options for HPCM were steady-state mobilization with G-CSF and chemomobilization characterized by administration of G-CSF following completion of chemotherapy, either as a separate mobilization chemotherapy or as part of a disease-specific chemotherapy regimen. Compared to steady-state mobilization with G-CSF, the probability of achieving desired stem cell yield with lower number of leukapheresis procedures is higher with chemomobilization [9]. Steady-state mobilization with G-CSF alone or chemomobilization will result in mobilization failure in 15–30% of patients [36]. In the last decade many study groups exerted great effort to identify patients who will fail to achieve desired progenitor cell yield before the first mobilization attempt or at early time points in the course of HPCM in order to define the optimal strategy (chemomobilization or plerixafor+G-CSF upfront) or adding plerixafor on demand (just-in-time

or preemptive), respectively [24–28,31,32,37,38]. Unfortunately, clinical risk factors before start of HPCM are frequently inaccurate to predict mobilization failure and risk-scoring systems should be validated before using in real-life decision-making [31,37,38]. The recent evidence suggest, that preemptive use of plerixafor in patients who will likely fail based on low PBCD34⁺ cell count seems to be the most effective strategy, especially if optimal rather than minimal cell yields are desired [24–27,32,33,39].

Until early 2017, National Social Security Institution (NSSI) of Turkey covered the cost of mobilization with plerixafor+G-CSF only for patients who failed at least two mobilization attempts including steady-state mobilization and chemomobilization. Therefore, common policy in real-life was steady-state mobilization at first line, chemomobilization at second line and plerixafor+G-CSF as third line attempt (step-by-step approach). Nowadays, application of plerixafor+G-CSF is possible in patients following failed chemomobilization. On the other hand, due to current regulations the preemptive use of plerixafor (just-in-time or on-demand approach) is not option in the country. Using preemptive plerixafor in steady-state mobilization or chemomobilization settings, the required apheresis sessions to reach the desired progenitor cell yields are frequently in the range of 1–3 [33,39–41]. Currently, the cost of two vials of plerixafor (Mozobil[®] 20 mg/ml, 1.2 ml sc) and single AHCT to NSSI of Turkey are almost 6800 \$ and 13800 \$, respectively. Therefore, cost of plerixafor seems to be an important barrier for application of preemptive strategy. Using plerixafor rescue following failed chemomobilization will not change the drug-specific cost, but additionally it will negatively affect the motivation of the patient, delay a potentially curative treatment, and increase the workload of apheresis staff.

In the era of preemptive plerixafor, upfront plerixafor+G-CSF or plerixafor+chemotherapy+G-CSF do not seem feasible in any patient including those having various risk factors for mobilization failure [33]. We suggest chemomobilization using disease specific regimens as part of induction or salvage in patients with NHL and HL, who need tumor reduction where preemptive plerixafor is not an option. In MM patients, the commonly used high-dose cyclophosphamide or etoposide-based regimens apart from induction/salvage do not have strong effect on tumor control in the era of novel agents like immunomodulatory drugs, proteasome inhibitors, monoclonal antibodies etc. [8]. As a result of current regulations in Turkey, chemomobilization at first line may still be preferred even in MM patients, because rescue attempt with plerixafor is possible if chemomobilization fails.

3.5.1. Position statement on mobilization strategy

Preemptive plerixafor following G-CSF or chemotherapy+G-CSF should be preferred, if available. Due to the current regulations in Turkey, chemomobilization may be preferred at first attempt. We suggest chemomobilization using disease specific regimens as part of induction or salvage in patients with NHL and HL, who need tumor reduction. High-dose cyclophosphamide or etoposide-based regimens apart from induction/salvage may be used in MM patients as first line of HPCM. Steady-state mobilization with G-CSF alone may still be an option for patients who do not need tumor reduction, do not accept prolonged hospitalization and risk of febrile neutropenia, and have no or limited number risk factors for mobilization failure. Clinical risk factors before start of mobilization are frequently inaccurate to predict mobilization failure and risk-scoring systems should be validated before using in real-life decision-making.

Conflict of interest statement

All authors declare that they do not have any potential conflict of interest that could inappropriately influence the present study.

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