



Expert Perspective: Understanding Precision Medicine

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Dr. Bradbury:

Precision medicine is a great concept, and there are certain cases where I think it has been successful. So ALK mutations in lung cancer and you get crizotinib (Xalkori), and people have great outcomes. Melanomas had a lot of great outcomes with precision medicine as well. These are cancers where historically there have been limited successful treatments.

So there have been some great success stories which give us the dream of precision medicine. But we are still a long way's away from realizing that dream. It is not a reason to not embark on it, but I think it is important to embark in it, share data and share knowledge so that we get it right. There is still a lot that we don't know. I think a lot of patients, you know precision medicine has gotten so much press, and in some ways it has been simplified as being ready now, and we are still very far from having all of the answers.

There are a lot of thorny issues, and some of them were discussed today, in embarking on precision medicine, with incidental findings, and potentially identifying a germline risk when you weren't anticipating that. So there are a lot of issues to be worked out. Even from a therapeutic standpoint, we don't always know which mutations are driver mutations, which therapies will really work. Things that we think make sense because of a pathway, don't always play out that way in the trials.

Or as we saw in the session today, there can be conflicting data. So a variant could be identified and is felt to predict X, and then another study does it, and it is found to be protective instead of a risk factor. So there is still a lot to know. I think there is a lot of reason to have enthusiasm. I still think there is a lot of reason to invest in it. I still think it is a great idea to participate in precision medicine trials.

So much in cancer therapy, we wouldn't have all of the options and the treatments that we have now if it wasn't for all of those who came before and gave of their own time, body, and took risks to participate in these studies. I hope that patients will continue to do that, because it is a great promise. For some people, there is success right now, but for many others it is still coming.

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