

[Abstract 37]

THE INITIAL “FLARE” OF IGM LEVEL AFTER RITUXIMAB THERAPY IN PATIENTS DIAGNOSED WITH WALDENSTROM MACROGLOBULINEMIA

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OBJECTIVE: To characterize the initial increase in IgM level in patients diagnosed with Waldenstrom Macroglobulinemia (WM) and treated with rituximab. **PATIENTS AND METHODS:** Seventy-two patients were treated with rituximab 375 mg/m² weekly for 4 weeks in a phase II ECOG study from April 2000 to January 2002. Five time points were used to characterize the changes that occur in the IgM level.

RESULTS: Twenty-nine (54%) patients among the 54 on whom we had measurements at both baseline and timepoint 1 developed an initial increase in the IgM level from baseline. At 2 months, 13/22 (59%) continued to have an increased IgM, and at 4 months 4/15 (27%) continued to have an elevated IgM level. A non-linear trend indicating an initial increase in the IgM level followed by a decline was observed ($p < 0.0001$).

CONCLUSION: Treating physicians need to be aware that the IgM flare phenomenon may occur in up to 54% of the patients treated with rituximab, but most of these patients will show a subsequent decline in the IgM level after 4 months from initiation of therapy. Therefore, they should not be discouraged to continue a potentially effective therapy as slow responses may occur. Longer follow up will indicate whether these patients have a worse overall survival and time to progression or not. We could not identify factors that predict development of this phenomenon.