Panitumumab the first fully human monoclonal antibody: from the bench to the clinic
Michael Cohenuram and Muhammad Wasif Saif

Panitumumab (formerly known as ABX-EGF) is the first fully human monoclonal antibody to epidermal growth factor receptor to enter clinical trials for the treatment of solid tumors. Like cetuximab (Erbitux; BMS), it is directed against the extracellular ligand-binding domain of the receptor and results in blockade of the essential downstream signaling pathways that are known to govern apoptosis, proliferation and differentiation of both normal and neoplastic cell types in a wide array of tissues. It has a very high affinity for epidermal growth factor receptor and has been generally well tolerated and associated with very few infusion reactions. As a fully human agent, panitumumab has not been associated with the formation of any antibodies directed against it that has been evidenced by a very reliable pharmacokinetic profile with possible dosing schedules ranging from 1 to 3 weeks. Similar to other agents targeting the epidermal growth factor receptor pathway, a rash has been the primary toxicity and is dose dependent up to 2.5 mg/kg at which dose 100% of all patients have been affected. The anti-tumor activity of panitumumab has been tested in vitro and in vivo, and inhibition of tumor growth has been observed in numerous cancer models, particularly lung, kidney and colorectal. It has been efficacious and well tolerated both as monotherapy and in combination with other chemotherapeutic agents. Several phase I trials, two phase II trials and most recently a phase III trial in pretreated colorectal cancer have been carried out to date. Currently, there is also a randomized phase III trial (Panitumumab Advanced Colorectal Cancer Evaluation Study) investigating the role of panitumumab in the first-line treatment of colorectal cancer. No unfavorable drug–drug interactions have been observed nor has there been any effect on the pharmacokinetics of drugs with which it is being used. Recent progress in preclinical and clinical studies of panitumumab is reviewed. Anti-Cancer Drugs 18:7–15 © 2007 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Keywords: colorectal cancer, cetuximab (Erbitux), epidermal growth factor, panitumumab

Introduction
Agents targeting the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) pathway offer promise for the treatment of patients with advanced disease, particularly when the intent of standard chemotherapy is palliation. EGFR is overexpressed in numerous types of solid tumors, including colorectal cancer (CRC). [1] EGFR activation is associated with proliferation, anti-apoptosis and metastatic spread, making this pathway a particularly compelling target for rational drug design. [1] Currently, there are two classes of anti-EGFR agents: the monoclonal antibodies directed toward the extracellular EGFR domain (cetuximab, panitumumab) and small-molecule tyrosine kinase (TK) inhibitors, which inactivate the receptor enzyme activity (gefitinib, erlotinib) [1].

EGFR (HER1 or ErbB1) belongs to the ErbB family of related cell membrane receptors. [1–3] The other members of this family include: HER2/neu (ErbB2), HER3 (ErbB3) and HER4 (ErbB4). [1–3] These receptors are transmembrane glycoproteins consisting of an extracellular ligand-binding domain, a hydrophobic transmembrane domain, and a cytoplasmic domain containing the TK domain and a carboxy-terminal region with tyrosine autophosphorylation sites. [1–3] After receptor–ligand binding, dimerization and autophosphorylation of the receptor TK, a complex series of signal transduction pathways are activated, and downstream signaling molecules such as mitogen-activated protein kinase, AKT and phosphatidylinositol 3'-kinase are known to effect key tumorigenic processes such as proliferation, differentiation, migration/motility, adhesion, prevention of apoptosis, enhanced survival and gene transcription [1,2].

EGFR is expressed on nearly all normal cells, particularly those of epithelial origin such as the liver, skin and gastrointestinal tract, but not on hematopoietic cells [3,4]. The level of expression is highly variable in normal tissues. [4] The EGFR signal is strictly regulated in normal cells [1,2]. In malignant cells, EGFR TK may be inappropriately activated and drives uncontrolled cancer
growth as well as angiogenesis and metastatic tumor spread [1,2]. This excessive signaling in tumor cells may be the result of EGFR overexpression, increased production of receptor ligands, heterodimerization with other ErbB receptors, transactivation of heterologous signaling networks within the cell, activating mutations or loss of regulatory mechanisms for receptor signaling [5,6]. In the 1980s, EGFR was identified as a cellular oncogene with homology to the v-erb-b viral oncogene and investigators began to explore the possibility of blocking this receptor to inhibit tumor growth [2]. The inhibition of cell growth resulting from blockade of EGFR is characterized by G1 cell cycle arrest that has been attributed to blockade-induced upregulation/accumulation of the cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitors p27kip1 and/or p21cip1/waf1 [5,6].

Panitumumab is distinct from the other anti-EGFR MAbs with therapeutic potential since the initial development of hybridoma technology nearly three decades ago [21]. The early MAbs were fully murine proteins, which elicited a humoral immune response in humans; human anti-mouse antibodies. This reaction limited the safety and efficacy of MAbs, particularly with respect to repeat administrations. Chimeric antibodies, which contain a human antibody constant region with a murine variable region, offered some improvement. At approximately 34% mouse origin, however, chimeric antibodies are still potentially immunogenic [14]. Humanized antibodies, which contain 5–10% murine proteins, have been created by fusing a murine variable or hypervariable region to human constant region [13]. Although clearly less immunogenic, humanized MAbs are still capable of eliciting a humoral immune response.

Fully human MAbs can be expected to produce minimal, if any, immunogenic response, and may be more suitable for the chronic treatment and management of patients with cancer. Generation of a fully human MAb has been accomplished via several different technologies such as the creation of a transgenic strain of mouse, known as XenoMouse; a product of crossbreeding between mice designed to be homozygous for deletions in their own heavy and light chain loci with other mice transfected with yeast vectors bearing human heavy and light chains [13].

### In-vitro and preclinical activity of panitumumab

The treatment of athymic mice with panitumumab 0.2 mg intraperitoneally twice weekly for 3 weeks completely prevented the formation of EGFR-overexpressing human epidermoid carcinoma A431 xenografts eliminated [13,14]. Panitumumab is administered with no loading dose or premedication. Panitumumab has high affinity and specificity for the EGFR, exhibiting dose-dependent pharmacokinetics (PKs) and a 50% inhibitory concentration, substantially lower than that of cetuximab. Activity in a variety of solid tumors has been reported [15–20].

Much progress has been made in the generation of MAbs with therapeutic potential since the initial development of hybridoma technology nearly three decades ago [21]. The early MAbs were fully murine proteins, which elicited a humoral immune response in humans; human anti-mouse antibodies. This reaction limited the safety and efficacy of MAbs, particularly with respect to repeat administrations. Chimeric antibodies, which contain a human antibody constant region with a murine variable region, offered some improvement. At approximately 34% mouse origin, however, chimeric antibodies are still potentially immunogenic [14]. Humanized antibodies, which contain 5–10% murine proteins, have been created by fusing a murine variable or hypervariable region to human constant region [13]. Although clearly less immunogenic, humanized MAbs are still capable of eliciting a humoral immune response.

### Panitumumab

Panitumumab is a chimeric IgG1 monoclonal antibody (MAb) that selectively binds EGFR. In addition to the effects of blocking the EGFR signaling pathways, immunologic effects, such as cell-dependent cytotoxicity and antibody-dependent cell-mediated cytotoxicity, may contribute to cetuximab’s mechanism of action [3]. Panitumumab has demonstrated activity and survival benefits in combination with cytotoxic chemotherapy in phase II trials in patients with CRC, and in phase III trials in combination with both cytotoxics and radiotherapy in squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck [7–11]. The most common side-effect of cetuximab is a rash. Allergic and anaphylactoid reactions have been reported with cetuximab administration [7–11]. The development of human anti-chimeric antibodies (HACAs) has been reported in four of 120 patients (3.3%); three of the four patients had neutralizing antibodies [12]. Other humanized MAbs against EGFR with demonstrated activity against solid tumors include: EMD72000 (matuzumab), OSAG101/Theraloc (nimotuzumab) and h-R3 (TheraCIM), which are further detailed in Table 1.

### Table 1  Monoclonal antibodies directed against epidermal growth factor receptor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monoclonal antibody</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Additional comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cetuximab (C225)</td>
<td>chimeric IgG1</td>
<td>approved for CRC</td>
<td>rash common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>approved for head and neck cancer</td>
<td>rare anaphylactoid reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>phase II NSCLC and others</td>
<td>hypomagnesemia is on target effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matuzumab (EMD72000)</td>
<td>humanized IgG1</td>
<td>phase I and II for CRC</td>
<td>q3 week dosing possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>phase II for recurrent ovarian cancer</td>
<td>headache and fever at high doses have been dose limiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>phase II for NSCLC</td>
<td>maximally tolerated dose has been determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimotuzumab TheraCIM (h-R3)</td>
<td>humanized IgG1</td>
<td>phase II for esophogastric cancer</td>
<td>being studied in conjunction with radiotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>currently under study in head and neck cancer gliomas pancreatic cancer</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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CRC, colorectal cancer; NSCLC, non-small-cell lung cancer.
[22]. Furthermore, administration of panitumumab at low doses for 3 weeks without concomitant chemotherapy or radiation fully eliminated tumors as large as 1.2 cm$^3$ and a total dose of 0.6 mg was successful in extirpating tumors in 65% of the inoculated mice. Although similar results have been reported with other EGFR-targeted agents, the fact that no tumor recurrences have been noted for more than 8 months after the last antibody injection in any of the animals makes the results with panitumumab unprecedented [23–28]. The authors of the study suggest that this further reflects the capacity of panitumumab to effect total tumor cell eradication [22].

In addition to the demonstrated inhibition of growth in EGFR-overexpressing cell lines, such as A431 and MDA-MB-468, panitumumab has also been shown to inhibit growth of other cancers with significantly lower levels of EGFR expression [13]. Similar results were observed in the renal, breast, pancreatic, ovarian, prostate and CRC human tumor xenografts with varying EGFR expression [13]. The magnitude of tumor growth inhibition achieved following panitumumab treatment, however, seemed to relate to a threshold EGFR level as significant growth inhibition of xenografts expressing at least 17,000 receptors per cell were noted, whereas xenografts expressing 11,000 or fewer receptors per cell seemed not to be affected by panitumumab treatment [13].

Further studies using the A431 tumor model demonstrated that panitumumab administered concomitantly with cytotoxic chemotherapy produced additive anti-tumor effects. The A431 inoculated nude mice were either treated with placebo, cisplatin 50 μg, panitumumab 30 μg or combined cisplatin and panitumumab. Significant divergence in mean tumor volumes was seen by day 18 and by day 47; the cohort receiving combined treatment had a tumor volume that was approximately 25% of those treated with panitumumab alone and approximately 10% of the group receiving cisplatin monotherapy [13,29].

Pharmacokinetics in animal models
Pharmacologic studies of panitumumab in mice and non-human primates have been used to simulate the PK profiles in humans and predict effective dosing regimens. Clearance (CL) of panitumumab in mice, in which the MAb is not cross-reactive, was slow and linear. In contrast, in cynomolgus monkeys, in which there is expected to be a degree of cross-reactivity, CL decreased from 20 ml/kg/day at a dose of 0.6 mg/kg down to approximately 8 ml/kg/day at a dose of 6 mg/kg and only decreased to approximately 5 ml/kg/day when the dose was further increased by a magnitude of 10. On the basis of the rapid CL seen in the monkeys at non-saturating doses, human CL was similarly anticipated to be non-linear owing to the role of the EGFR itself as a mode of MAb CL [30].

The dose-schedule determined for phase I studies was based on allometric scaling of the aforementioned data [31].

Clinical studies panitumumab
Two phase I and two phase II studies (one monotherapy and one in combination with chemotherapy) for metastatic CRC have been conducted. Additionally, interim analyses of two ongoing phase II studies were presented at the 2006 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Meeting.

Phase I studies
Rowinsky et al. [32] performed a phase I study of panitumumab to determine the anti-tumor activity of panitumumab in previously treated patients with metastatic renal cell carcinoma, and to characterize its toxicity, immunogenicity, PKs and pharmacodynamics. Eighty-eight patients were treated with panitumumab doses of 1.0, 1.5, 2.0 or 2.5 mg/kg weekly with no loading dose. Major responses occurred in three patients, and two patients had minor responses. Forty-four patients (50%) also had stable disease (SD) at their first 8-week assessment and the median progression-free survival (PFS) was 100 days [95% confidence interval (CI), 58–140 days]. An acneiform rash was the principal toxicity and occurred in 68, 95, 87 and 100% of patients who received at least three doses of panitumumab at 1.0, 1.5, 2.0 and 2.5 mg/kg/week, respectively. The rash was noted to reach maximal intensity between weeks 3 and 5, and then steadily abated despite continued treatment. Of the patients receiving 2.5 mg/kg, 75% experienced grade 2 and 3 skin reactions compared with 32–52% of those treated with the lower dose levels. A trend indicated that the severity of the rash may relate to PFS. The other most frequent toxicities were asthenia, unspecified pain and back pain, none of which were dose related nor were they dose limiting. The hypothesized intrinsic lack of immunogenicity to this fully human MAb was supported by the fact that no human anti-human antibodies (HAHAs) were detected. Panitumumab PKs fit a model that incorporated both linear and saturable EGFR-mediated CL mechanisms, and interindividual variability was low. Steady states increased non-linearly with the dose and the half-life derived as a secondary parameter when the receptor-mediated CL pathway was saturated at 15.9 days. At both the 2.0 and 2.5 mg/kg/week dose levels, concentrations throughout treatment exceeded those estimated to saturate non-linear CL and inhibit xenograft growth by 90%, and concentrations achieved with 1.5 mg/kg/week approached this as well.

A second phase I trial by Figlin et al. [33] using doses ranging from 0.1 mg/kg up to 2.5 mg/kg was performed with 43 patients with multiple tumor types; renal ($n = 10$), prostate ($n = 13$), non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) ($n = 7$), pancreatic ($n = 3$), esophageal ($n = 3$)
and CRC \((n = 7)\). Patients received up to 4 weekly doses, and those evidencing response or stability were eligible to continue to receive treatment every other week for 6 additional months or until disease progression. Biologic activity was seen even with low doses, including one patient with esophageal cancer treated with the lowest dose that had SD for 7 months. A partial response (PR) of 10 months duration was seen in one patient with colorectal cancer treated with 2.5 mg/kg. The incidence of rash in patients receiving 2.0 or 2.5 mg/kg approached 100%. Overall, panitumumab was well tolerated and no allergic reactions, infusion-related or serious adverse events were observed. Moreover, no HAHA were detected.

Weiner et al. updated the data reported by Figlin et al., treating an additional 50 patients, with updated report at the 2005 ASCO Meeting. Sequential cohorts were enrolled to receive four infusions of panitumumab monotherapy at different dose levels ranging from 0.01 to 5.0 mg/kg once per week, 6.0 mg/kg every 2 weeks and 9.0 mg/kg every 3 weeks \[34\]. Ninety-six patients were enrolled and treated (CRC \(n = 39\), lung \(n = 14\), pancreatic \(n = 3\), prostate \(n = 21\), renal \(n = 15\), esophageal \(n = 3\) and anal cancer \(n = 1\)). Grade 3 or 4 toxicities were observed in 10% of patients with 7% being grade 3 skin toxicity. No maximally tolerated dose was reached and PKs were noted to be stable over the range of dosing schedules. Of particular note, five of the 39 CRC patients achieved PR.

Phase II studies

Phase II trial of panitumumab as monotherapy in patients with chemotherapy-resistant metastatic colorectal cancer. The primary end point of this study was to assess the OR with secondary objectives to evaluate the safety and efficacy of panitumumab in patients with CRC following 8 weeks of therapy including response rates and PFS and overall survival (OS) \[35,36\]. Assessment based on level of EGFR expression was also carried out. Patients enrolled into the study had measurable disease, an Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group performance status of no higher than 1 and had failed therapy with a fluoropyrimidine with irinotecan or oxaliplatin or both. A total of 148 evaluable patients were entered into this study. One hundred percent of the patients had received prior treatment with a fluoropyrimidine, 96% with irinotecan and 49% with oxaliplatin. Patients received a weekly dose of 2.5 mg/kg over 1 h and no loading dose or premedications. Patients were allowed to continue on panitumumab as long as there were clinical benefits and no unacceptable toxicities.

Panitumumab was generally well tolerated, with rash and fatigue being the most commonly reported adverse events in the trial. The rash was typically a maculopapular aceneiform rash appearing on the face and trunk within 1–3 weeks of beginning of panitumumab therapy. The rash persisted, usually without worsening, through the duration of treatment. Only four patients discontinued treatment owing to skin toxicity. Grade 3 toxicities were infrequent and there were no reported grade 4 events. Only one patient had a grade 3 infusion reaction and this did not result in any interruption of treatment. In the testing of 107 patients to date, no HAHA formation has been detected.

By Response Evaluation Criteria In Solid Tumors criteria with central review, 9% \((13)\) of patients were found to have responded after 8 weeks of therapy. Overall, 29% of patients had SD with a median duration of response of 5.2 months and a median OS of 9.4 months. No meaningful difference was seen when the results were broken down into the two cohorts as based on immunohistochemical demonstration of EGFR expression.

A retrospective analysis to determine the effect of prior regimens on response to panitumumab did not show any significant difference in response between patients who had received three prior agents as opposed to two. Similar to other studies with EGFR-related agents, there was a trend toward a correlation between clinical response and severity of the rash; approximately 62% of those with at least a grade 2 rash had either a PR or SD.

Phase II trial in combination with either IFL or FOLFIRI as first-line therapy for metastatic colorectal cancer. This phase II study was performed to assess both the safety and efficacy of panitumumab when given in combination with IFL (Saltz regimen: irinotecan 125 mg/m², leucovorin 20 mg/m² and 5-FU 500 mg/m² on days 1, 8, 15 and 22) as first-line therapy in metastatic CRC patients \[37,38\]. All patients were required to have EGFR expression of 2+ or 3+ in 10% or more by immunohistochemistry. The first 19 patients received panitumumab in combination with IFL weekly for 4 weeks of each 6-week treatment cycle. On the basis of the data from the first few patients and the change in the standard of care from bolus to infusional 5-FU, the decision was made to amend the protocol to include another regimen, FOLFIRI (irinotecan 180 mg/m², leucovorin 400 mg/m² and 5-FU as a 400 mg/m² bolus followed by 2.4–3 g/m² over 46 h) \[37,38\].

Among 19 patients who received panitumumab with IFL, diarrhea was the most common non-skin toxicity observed in this study and skin toxicity was seen in 100% of the participants. Both of these toxicities were expected on the basis of the mechanism of action of these agents. Sixteen percent experienced a grade 3 skin reaction and there were no grade 4 dermatologic reactions. Forty-seven percent experienced grade 3 diarrhea and only one patient experienced grade 4 diarrhea.
Forty-seven percent of the patients on this trial had a response. Five additional patients (26%) had SD. The combination of chemotherapy and panitumumab had a disease control rate (OR + SD) of 74% in this study. The median PFS was 5.6 months and the OS was 17 months.

The patients enrolled into the second part of this study received panitumumab combined with FOLFIRI [38]. Twenty-four patients were entered into part 2 of the study. Initial safety and efficacy results were first presented at the 2005 European Conference on Clinical Oncology Meeting and more updated at the 2006 GI ASCO Meeting, the latter of which included analyses of both parts of the study. In keeping with the greater tolerability of FOLFIRI as opposed to IFL, fewer patients experienced grade 3 or 4 diarrhea; six (25%) and 0 (0%), respectively. All patients experienced skin-related toxicity, grade 3 reactions were seen in four (17%) of the patients and there were no grade 4 dermatologic reactions.

Similar to the results of part 1 of the trial, the disease control rate was 79%, with 33% achieving a PR and 46% exhibiting SD. Median PFS is 10.9 months, whereas survival data is not yet mature.

**Phase II studies of pretreated patients with metastatic colorectal cancer stratified on the basis of the level of epidermal growth factor receptor expression**

Interim analyses of two ongoing multicenter phase II studies are investigating panitumumab monotherapy in patients whose disease has progressed despite treatment with two or more regimens with fluoropyrimidines; irinotecan and oxaliplatin were recently presented at the 2006 ASCO meeting [39,40]. Patients with tumors expressing EGFR in more than 10% of cells are being enrolled into one of the studies. The other study is investigating the efficacy of panitumumab in patients with metastatic CRC whose tumors express low levels of EGFR (1–9%) or who have EGFR-negative (below 1% expression) tumors.

In the study of low and non-expressers of EGFR, 88 of a planned 150 patients have been enrolled and 23 patients have been treated for a sufficient period of time to be included in a safety and efficacy analysis [39]. Two of the 11 patients whose tumor was negative for EGFR had a PR, whereas one of 12 low expressers achieved a PR. An additional 30% achieved SD with a median PFS of 7.9 weeks. In the study of high expressers, 91 patients have thus far been treated with plans to accrue an additional 209 patients. Thirty-nine patients in this trial were included in the efficacy set [40]. Three patients obtained a PR with durations of response between 12 and 14 weeks. An additional eight patients had SD. Safety profiles for the two studies are fairly equivalent. In both studies, greater than 90% of the patients experienced an adverse event and between 19 and 24% were grade 3 or higher. Not surprisingly, the predominant toxicity was dermatologic with 92% affected in one study and 96% in the other. Hypomagnesemia was also common; 8 and 12%. In the study of low expressers, there were three infusion reactions with one patient discontinuing treatment as a result. In the study of high expressers, there was one hypersensitivity reaction but the patient was able to continue on with the treatment with appropriate premedications. No HAHA formation has been observed in either study.

**Phase III study of panitumumab as monotherapy in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer**

Mature results from a large, multicenter phase III study comparing panitumumab monotherapy versus best supportive care in patients with pretreated metastatic CRC were recently presented at plenary session of the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research [41]. This study of 463 patients was powered to detect a 33% difference in PFS, but the actual figure far exceeded this with a risk reduction of 46% that was statistically significant with \( P < 0.000000001 \). The overall response rate was 36 versus 10% in the control arm with a median duration of response of 17 weeks. At 6 months, PFS was 18 versus 5% and at 8 months, this difference was still maintained: 10 versus 4%. All responses were evaluated by an independent, central review. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Although no difference has been noted in OS, this is likely to have been confounded by the fact that 75% of those on the best supportive care arm crossed over to panitumumab with impressive results. Of the 174 patients who crossed over to the treatment arm, there was a 9% PR and 32% with SD. Toxicities have been in keeping with what has been seen with earlier trials and there were no grade 3 or 4 infusion reactions. On the basis of these results, Amgen and Abgenix were allowed to file a Biologic License Application for panitumumab, which was accepted and the drug has now been granted priority status by the Food and Drug Administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Summary of results of phase III trial comparing panitumumab monotherapy versus BSC in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer previously treated with irinotecan and oxaliplatin</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panitumumab (n=232)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFS at 24 weeks (%)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFS at 32 weeks (%)</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>RR (%)</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>SD (%)</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORR (%)</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median duration of response (weeks)</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

BSC, best supportive care; PFS, progression-free survival; RR, response rate; SD, stable disease; ORR, overall response rate.
Ongoing studies

Study of panitumumab in CRC proceeds in a number of ongoing trials. As noted, accrual continues in the two studies analyzing safety and efficacy of panitumumab on the basis of levels of EGFR expression. A large, randomized phase III trial, the Panitumumab Advanced Colorectal Cancer Evaluation Study (PACCE), is investigating the role of panitumumab in the first-line therapy of metastatic colorectal cancer. There are two separate cohorts. The first is 800 patients receiving FOLFOX and bevacizumab with or without panitumumab. The second cohort with 200 patients will receive FOLFIRI in addition to the aforementioned biologic agents. The primary analysis will be PFS in the FOLFOX cohort [42]. Additionally, a phase I study is underway to evaluate panitumumab given concurrently with the novel agent AMG 706, an oral drug with activity against multiple TKs including vascular endothelial growth factor, platelet-derived growth factor and Kit [43].

Pharmacokinetics

The PKs of panitumumab has been determined in a number of trials at varying doses and for multiple indications. As mentioned earlier, it has been demonstrated that CL of panitumumab is mediated by two separate pathways [29,30]. The EGFR itself acts as a sink with CL decreasing in a dose-dependent manner [31,32]. Once the receptor becomes saturated, the reticular–endothelial system assumes a greater role and the PK becomes linear [32]. Intersubject variability is low with interpatient coefficients of variation for areas under the curve below 20% even at high doses [44]. On the basis of observations of both clinical safety data and biomarkers of EGFR occupancy (rash and PK), 2.5 mg/kg has been determined to be the optimal weekly dose [32]. Of significant interest is the data from studies employing flexible dosing schedules that demonstrated the trough level for 6 mg/kg q2w and 9 mg/kg q3w to be similar to the aforementioned optimal weekly dose [34,45]. The consistency and stability of the PK over time is consistent with the absence of immunogenicity of panitumumab [33]. Finally, no apparent drug interactions have been observed when panitumumab has been given concurrently with other cytotoxic agents [20,38,46]. Summary of PK studies of panitumumab is given in Table 3 [20,30–32,34,37,38,45–47].

Comparison between panitumumab and cetuximab (Erbitux)

No prospective comparative study between panitumumab and cetuximab has been conducted at present [48]. Although no HAHAs to panitumumab have yet been observed, development of human anti-chimeric antibodies has been reported in up to 3% of those receiving cetuximab with a significant number of these antibodies having a neutralizing effect [12]. Thus far there have only been five infusion reactions to panitumumab reported in clinical trials and in only one instance did this result in any treatment interruptions [36,39,40]. Additionally, panitumumab has been able to be administered without premedication, whereas it is recommended that H1 antagonists be administered before cetuximab infusion, and epinephrine, corticosteroids, bronchodilators and oxygen should be readily available (Erbitux package insert). In Cunningham’s multicenter randomized control trial comparing cetuximab alone versus cetuximab given in combination with irinotecan, four of 329 patients had severe anaphylactic reactions characterized by the rapid onset of airway obstruction, urticaria and hypotension [9]. Although most of these infusion reactions occurred during the initial infusion, severe reactions have also been seen with later treatments and it is recommended that all patients receiving cetuximab be observed for at least 1 h after their infusion (Erbitux package insert).

The skin reaction is an on-target effect, as it is seen with significant frequency with both panitumumab and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Description</th>
<th>Summary of results</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preclinical in-vivo animal-based studies</td>
<td>clearance mediated by both the reticular–endothelial system and epidermal growth factor receptor itself; both linear and nonlinear minimal interpatient variation optimal weekly dose 2.5 mg/kg at which clearance is near its minimum and EGFR is near saturation</td>
<td>Roskos et al. [30,31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I in patients with metastatic renal cell cancer</td>
<td>clinical data nearly identical and thus confirming findings from pre-clinical studies</td>
<td>Rowinsky et al. [32]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I study in advanced cancer</td>
<td>doses of 6 mg/kg q2w and 9 mg/kg q3w safe and feasible trough levels consistent and predictable and similar to that found for weekly dosing at 2.5 mg/kg no MTD reached</td>
<td>Weiner [34], Arends and Yang [45]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II study in metastatic CRC</td>
<td>stable PK when given in conjunction with IFL PK of irinotecan unaffected no increase in toxicity</td>
<td>Hecht et al. [37,38,46,47]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II study in advanced NSCLC</td>
<td>safe and well tolerated when given in conjunction with paclitaxel and carboplatin no PK interactions</td>
<td>Crawford [20]</td>
</tr>
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</table>

PK, pharmacokinetic; CRC, colorectal cancer; MTD, maximally tolerated dose; IFL, irinotecan 125 mg/m²; leucovorin 20 mg/m² and 5-FU 500 mg/m²; NSCLC, non-small-cell lung cancer.
cetuximab. Cetuximab has, however, additionally demonstrated several unique toxicities. In the aforementioned study by Cunningham, almost 10% of patients treated with cetuximab monotherapy developed significant asthenia and three of 774 patients have developed severe cases of interstitial lung disease (Erbitux package insert). Both cetuximab and panitumumab have been associated with hypomagnesaemia, which is thought to be an on-target effect of the drug class owing to strong EGFR expression in the loop of Henle [49].

Although panitumumab has been demonstrated to have a significantly higher affinity for the EGFR ($K_{15} = 0.05$ versus 0.39 nmol/1), cetuximab has also been found to saturate the systemic CL at dose levels that are easily tolerable [10]. Both drugs have demonstrated reliability with minimal interpatient variability and dose-dependent, non-linear PK. Neither of the MAbs has been found to have adverse interactions with concurrent cytotoxic chemotherapies either in terms of their PK or their toxicities, and thus are felt to be both safe and efficacious, both alone and in multidrug regimens [7–10,19,35,36,43,46,50]. Of the two drugs, only panitumumab has currently demonstrated flexible dosing schedules [34,45].

As noted above, panitumumab has demonstrated efficacy in a wide range of solid tumors. Similarly, cetuximab has been found to be efficacious and indeed is in widespread clinical use in solid tumors ranging from CRC to head and neck to NSCLC. Both panitumumab and cetuximab have been tested as monotherapy in patients with metastatic CRC that was refractory to standard first-line and second-line regimens with results listed in Table 4 [8,34,35,43,45]. Only panitumumab has been studied in a phase III setting versus best supportive care and thus is discussed separately.

Both groups were heavily pretreated and while inclusion criteria for the cetuximab group mandated demonstrated progression during or within 3 months of irinotecan-based therapy, 96% of those in the panitumumab study had similarly failed irinotecan. There may, however, have been significant differences in the baseline clinical characteristics between the two studies as suggested by the fact that the median survival time seen in the panitumumab study exceeded that seen in the study of cetuximab and irinotecan. Regardless, both drugs have established efficacy with statistical significance even in patients with advanced disease that has proved resistant to multiple treatment regimens.

**Discussion**

Panitumumab is a fully human MAb directed against EGFR. Unlike its chimeric and humanized precursors, no immunogenicity has been observed and thus has demonstrated improved safety and reliable dose-dependent PK with an 50% inhibitory concentration lower than other EGFR antibodies already in widespread clinical use. Infusion reactions are markedly fewer, particularly in terms of anaphylactoid reactions, and no loading doses, close observation or premedications have been required. Panitumumab has demonstrated significant activity against a broad array of solid tumors including the renal, breast, pancreatic, ovarian, prostate and CRC, both in vitro and in phase I clinical trials. While a threshold level of EGFR expression was seen, it was quite low and the efficacy of panitumumab was otherwise not correlated with levels of expression. Phase I studies have demonstrated that panitumumab is well tolerated. Doses up to 5 mg/kg/week and up to 9 mg/kg q3w have been delivered without observing dose-limiting toxicities. In metastatic CRC, panitumumab has demonstrated significant activity alone and in combination with other chemotherapeutic drugs. PK has been well studied both in phase I and phase II trials, and there have been no PK interactions seen with drugs such as the fluoropyrimidines and irinotecan. Like other EGFR-targeted agents, an acneiform rash has been the most frequently exhibited toxicity, but only infrequently has it been a cause of treatment cessation. The rash tended to appear within the first one to two doses and typically resolved within 4 weeks of treatment cessation. Moreover, there are some data to suggest that the severity of the rash correlates with clinical outcome. Development proceeds and panitumumab is now being studied as part of a multidrug first-line regimen in a randomized phase III trial for metastatic CRC as well as in several phase 2 trials as a salvage regimen.

**Table 4 Comparison of results of monotherapy with either panitumumab or cetuximab in previously treated patients with metastatic CRC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Panitumumab [35]</th>
<th>Cetuximab [8]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR (%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP (months)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS (months)</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acneiform rash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall incidence (all grades)</td>
<td>70–100</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ Grade 3 rash</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAHA/HACA (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergic reactions (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall incidence</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other toxicities (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstitial lung disease</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK interactions with other chemotherapies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity for EGFR (nmol/1)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of antibody</td>
<td>IgG2 100% human protein</td>
<td>IgG1 34% mouse protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premedications required</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative dosing schedules</td>
<td>doses of 6 mg/kg q2w and 9 mg/kg q3w safe and feasible [34,45]</td>
<td>not conclusively studied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CRC, colorectal cancer; OR, objective response; TTP, time to progression; OS, overall survival; HAHA, human anti-human antibodies; HACA, human antichimeric antibodies; PK, pharmacokinetic; EGFR, epidermal growth factor receptor.
Conclusion
Panitumumab is the first fully human MAb directed against EGFR in clinical use. It has proven to be very well tolerated both alone and in combination with other cytotoxic chemotherapeutic agents. The PK of panitumumab has been well studied, and has been shown to be very predictable over a wide range of doses and dosing intervals. Panitumumab has demonstrated efficacy both as monotherapy and with standard chemotherapeutic agents in a wide variety of cancer types including NSCLC, renal and CRC. To date no HAHAs have been detected and unlike cetuximab, infusion reactions are infrequent and no premedications are required when administering panitumumab. The only significant toxicity has been a rash similar to that seen with other agents targeting the EGFR receptor and such reactions have been predominantly mild to moderate. In metastatic CRC, panitumumab has been safe and efficacious when given with other commonly used agents in this disease including irinotecan and fluorouracil. Current studies under way are looking at panitumumab in combination with FOLFOX-bevacizumab as well as with novel agents that have yet to come into common clinical practice.

References
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