Veterans with CLL: How to Get the Benefits You Deserve

November 5, 2019

10:00 – 11:00 AM PDT / 1:00 – 2:00 PM EDT
Housekeeping Notes

Welcome to the CLL Society Webinar!
The presentation will start momentarily

• Please direct your questions to CLL Society faculty or staff using the Q&A function (located at the bottom of your screen) at any time throughout the presentation
• You will receive a short email survey after the webinar. Your response will help CLL Society plan future webinars.
• The webinar is being recorded and all recorded webinars and the presentation slides will be available on our website via the Support Groups/Education page on cllsociety.org.
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Speakers

**Moderator:** Brian Koffman, MDCM (retired), DCFP, FCFP, DABFP, MSEd
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**Speaker:** Edward Ratner, MD
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**Speaker:** Bruce Wright
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• Dr. Ratner has no conflicts of issue related to this presentation.
Acknowledgements

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• Bernadette Heron, Pharm.D.
• Jeremy Wolfsteller
• Bruce Wright
• Neil Patel, MD
What is CLL

• Most common adult blood cancer
• Accumulation of a specific type of white (infection fighting) blood cell
• Related to genetic mutations one is born with, accumulate with aging, and/or are caused by environmental factors
• Life limiting problems include:
  • Diminished ability to fight infections
  • Inability to make other types of blood cells needed to prevent bleeding or maintain oxygen delivery
• Fairly new drug treatments offer prolonged benefits and possibly cures
Epidemiology of CLL Among Veterans

- Including those not served by VA
  - ~ 5,000-10,000 new cases/year
  - ~ 20,000 – 40,000 veterans with CLL

- Veterans with CLL currently served at major VA Centers in:
  - Atlanta, GA – 200
  - Bay Pines, FL – 370
  - Greater Los Angeles – 170
  - Minneapolis – 320
  - St. Louis - 310
  - Total- 7100
VBA benefits for All Eligible Veterans

• Pension (minimum income guarantee)
  • for war time veterans only
  • asset limitation < $127,000
  • assures minimum income of at least
    • ~ $14,000 for single veteran
    • ~ $17,000 for married veteran
  • deductions for medical expenses (e.g. expensive CLL drugs)

• Home loans

• Educational benefits

• Vocational rehabilitation

https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/
CLL related VBA disability and related benefits

Service in Viet Nam era

Agent Orange exposure

CLL Diagnosis

Presumptive Service Connection

https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/bcell-leukemia.asp
Applying for VBA disability

• Possible to apply oneself – see https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/

• Recommended to get assistance from a Veteran Service Officer at a
  • County Veterans Office
  • Veteran Service Organization (e.g. American Legion, Viet Nam Veterans of America)
  • Or from an Attorney or other accredited representative

• Initial assistance is free

Disability Rating for CLL

• For early CLL, may be rated as 0% disabled or 100% disabled, depending upon whether such disease is considered “active”

• Swollen lymph nodes, without treatment, may be considered “active”
• Once treatment required, always considered active disease -> 100% disability rating
• Reassessment done 6 months after treatment ends
• Rating of 100% may trigger financial payments and other benefits
• Appeal of denial of Agent Orange exposure or initial 0% rating may be appropriate

https://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/bookc.asp Section 4.117
Sample VBA benefits for 100% rating

• Tax free disability payments - > $3000/month

https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/resources_comp01.asp

• Spouse gets CHAMPVA insurance coverage

• Survivors’ pension (e.g. lifetime payments) - ~$9000/year

• Children’s tuition benefit
Veterans Health Administration

- 170 hospitals and over 1000 clinics serving over 9 million veterans
- Described as “Best Care Anywhere”
- Operates nursing homes (Community Living Centers)
- Contracts for home care, hospice, nursing home care, DME

https://www.va.gov/health/aboutVHA.asp
Eligibility for Health Benefits

• Must be honorable discharge
  • Enlisted before 9/7/1980
  • If enlisted after 9/7/1980, 24 months active duty
  • Some exceptions exist

• Enhanced eligibility if service connected, poor, or functionally impaired

• Not all veterans are eligible for VA care for CLL
  • Affluence and wellness may limit primary and specialty care access
Applying for VHA Care

• On-line at: [https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction](https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction)

• By phone at: 877-222-8387

• In person at VA hospital

• Need your discharge paperwork
Care for CLL in VA Medical Centers

• Will need a VA primary care provider first

• Oncology clinics are in VA medical centers

• Mission Act allows for VA to pay for care elsewhere if:
  • Specialty care > 90 minutes away from home of veteran
  • Waiting time for visits too long
  • Non-VA provider enrolled in Mission Act program
Co-managed Care

• Can receive care both inside and outside VA, from different insurers

• VA requires at least annual primary care appointments

• Seeking ongoing oncology care both at the VA and from non-VA providers is discouraged.

• Second opinions from a CLL Center may be appropriate

• May be possible to drop Medicare supplement if using VA care
CLL Frontline Protocols – Mayo Clinic Recommendations

- Ibrutinib
- Venetoclax + obinutuzumab
- Ibrutinib +/- rituximab
- FCR (FLUDARABINE, CYCLOPHOSPHAMIDE, and RITUXIMAB)
- Obinutuzumab

-As presented by Dr. Parikh Sameer at LRF conference, Sept 2019
CLL Medications From VA

• VA health coverage includes medications

Ibrutinib Monograph Addendum

Ibrutinib (Imbruvica™)
National Drug Monograph Addendum
September 2019
VA Pharmacy Benefits Management Services, Medical Advisory Panel, and VISN Pharmacist Executives

Ibrutinib Criteria

Ibrutinib (Imbruvica™)
Criteria for Use
September 2014, Update September 2018, April 2019, September 2019
VA Pharmacy Benefits Management Services, Medical Advisory Panel, and VISN Pharmacist Executives

Ibrutinib Monograph Addendum (Sept 2019) - front line CLL/SLL
Ibrutinib CFU (updated Sept 2019)
Summary of VA Coverage

• Ibrutinib an approved drug for CLL/SLL, if
  • Goals of care and role of palliative care consult discussed
  • Pharmacy approves, using established criteria

• Some of the Exclusions:
  • Care not provided by VA or VA purchased care
  • Stroke within past 6 months
  • Clinically significant cardiac disease (e.g. uncontrolled arrythmia, advanced heart failure, recent MI)
  • Chronic or unresolved infection
  • Low neutrophil or platelet count
Cost and Use of Ibrutinib

• VA cost to purchase ibrutinib is $7,129/month (@ 420 mg X 30 days)

• No copay when high service connection disability rating

• For others, $11/month co-pay

• Ibrutinib rates of use vary widely across VA facilities
  • From 7% to 28% of enrolled veterans with CLL receiving ibrutinib
VA Medical Centers are Teaching Hospitals

• VA oncology clinics may include:
  • medical students (in Year 3-4 of graduate school to become a doctor)
  • residents from nearby Universities (doctors training in internal medicine)
  • oncology fellows (internal medicine specialists training for 2 years to sub-specialize in oncology)
  • other types of trainees (e.g. nursing, pharmacist)

• On-site supervision required for all trainees

• Opportunity for patients to teach trainees about CLL

• Patients may ask to see the attending physician (fully trained oncologist)
What To Do If You Are Dissatisfied with VA Care for your CLL

• Talk to your primary provider

• Ask to see a different oncologist at the VA

• Obtain a second opinion from a non-VA CLL expert

• Speak to a Patient Representative/Ombudsman at the VA

• Seek advice from a Veteran Service Officer

• Move care to a different VA Medical Center

• Seek care outside VA using other insurance
Other VHA Benefits

• Home Care
  • Post-acute
  • Long-term nursing and personal assistance
  • Homemaking
• Nursing home care (for > 70% S.C. disability rating, or in hospice)
• Travel costs (for Service Connected visits)
• Durable medical equipment
• Hospice
• Caregiver support programs
National Cemetery Administration

- Most veterans are eligible for burial benefits
- Plot and headstone or crypt for ashes at one of 138 national cemeteries
- Spouse may be buried in same grave
- Headstone at other cemeteries
- Military funeral honors
- Burial allowance (~$1500)

https://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/
Summary

• Veterans get CLL, with some at relatively high risk
• Veterans may have many financial and care benefits
• A pension and free VA care may be available
• To access benefits, help should be sought
• Advocacy to obtain optimal care may be needed
• All veterans with CLL should seek assistance, if possible, from the VA
Questions & Answers
Resources

• https://www.military.com/benefits/veterans-health-care/champva-overview.html

• https://nvf.org/champva-civilian-health-and-medical-program/

• https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits/champva/
Thank You for Attending!

If you have any additional questions, please contact support@cllsociety.org