



A pair of drugs have overshadowed the use of standard therapies after new clinical trials suggest they work better for advanced kidney cancer.

The two treatments -- nivolumab and cabozantinib -- each successfully prolonged the survival of renal-cell cancer patients during separate studies both published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Nivolumab, an existing drug sold as Opdivo, resulted in a 27 percent decreased risk of death during a clinical trial involving 821 patients in an advanced stage of kidney cancer. The therapy belongs to a group of drugs called immune checkpoint inhibitors, which enhance the body's natural defenses against cancer cells. Under the name Opdivo, the drug is already used to treat lung cancer and advanced skin cancer.

The nivolumab study was reportedly halted before its scheduled completion due to its overwhelming effectiveness in prolonging patients' lives and its much higher tumor response rate. Patients given the standard treatment, everolimus, were then treated with nivolumab instead for ethical reasons. Compared to the standard survival rate of 19.6 months with everolimus, patients treated with nivolumab during the clinical trials experienced a rate increase to 25 months.

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