

## Cancer-drug trials show promise

Ariz.-based studies have early favorable results

By Ken Alltucker

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Scientists at Translational Genomics Research Institute and Scottsdale Healthcare reported that two early-stage clinical trials conducted in Arizona show promise in treating patients with two types of cancer.

A potential drug effectively shrank tumors in eight of nine patients with advanced basal-cell carcinoma, a skin cancer. The Phase 1 trial showed the patients responded to the drugs with limited side effects such hair and weight loss, and the loss of taste.

Basal-cell carcinoma is one of the most common types of cancer with about 1 million new U.S. cases each year. The disease is easy to treat when detected early, but can spread to tissue and bones in more advanced stages.

Dr. Daniel Von Hoff, TGen's physician-in-chief and Scottsdale Healthcare's chief medical officer, said the finding is important because the ad-

vanced stages of the disease often cannot be cured with surgery or halted by existing treatment.

The drug candidate, called GDC-0449, works by blocking the "Hedgehog" pathway that produces a known tumor-producing gene. It was produced by San Francisco Bay Area biotech firm Genentech and tested in Scottsdale, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit.

Von Hoff and others hope to duplicate the findings by testing more patients.

"It has had a pretty dramatic effect," Von Hoff said. "I think this fulfills the promise of what targeted therapies can do, with dramatic effects and low side effects."

The second clinical trial studied how the combination of two existing drugs — gemcitabine and nab-paclitaxel — attacked pancreatic cancer. Early results suggest the drug combination showed tumors shrank in more than 60 percent of patients, Von Hoff

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said.

The Phase 1 pancreatic-cancer trial included results of 20 patients. Plans call for a study of 42 patients.

In addition to conducting the trial in Scottsdale, the pancreatic-cancer study had another Arizona connection. The study employed the use of a protein-based test developed by Los Angeles-based Abraxis Bioscience and Caris MPI, a local spinoff of the International Genomics Consortium and TGen. Abraxis sponsored the trial.

Von Hoff presented the findings this week at the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research.