

# Phase I Trials for Immunotherapy

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# Disclosures

- I am an employee of Ankyra Therapeutics
- I served on advisory boards for Castle Bioscience

# Important consideration in Phase I protocol development for immuno-oncology

- Phase I generally used to define drug safety, dosing and PK, but...
- Phase I can help define mechanism of action, be indication-finding, validate biomarker assays, provide early data for rapid approval, provide early information on potential combination approaches; so...
- It is important to define the role of Phase I studies in the larger development pathway for any given agent.

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## **Is Participation in Cancer Phase I Trials Really Therapeutic?**

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# Immunotherapy Phase 1 Clinical Trials

- General consideration in developing Phase 1 clinical trials
  - Study definitions
  - Unique aspects for immunotherapy agents
- Designing phase 1 immunotherapy clinical trials
  - Key elements of the clinical protocol
  - Study and patient monitoring considerations

# General Considerations

Phase 1 Immunotherapy Clinical Trials

# Types of Clinical Trials

- Natural History or Population (Cohort) studies
  - Untreated natural history
  - Treated with standard of care (SOC) therapy
- Prevention studies
  - Action studies (“do something”)
  - Agent studies (“take something”)
- Screening and Early Detection studies
  - Assesses methods for detecting cancer in asymptomatic individuals
- Diagnostic studies
  - Evaluates procedures (i.e., Imaging, blood tests) that more accurately diagnose cancer
- Biomarker studies
  - Tests prognostic and predictive markers from blood or tissue; bioshedding
- Quality-of-life and supportive care studies
  - Evaluates impact of intervention on quality of life, psychosocial impact on patients and caregivers
- **Intervention or Therapeutic studies**
  - Evaluates new approaches (drugs, radiation, surgery) or combinations on cancer outcomes
  - Typically occurs in 3-4 phases

# What is a “therapeutic” clinical trial?

- An experimental technique for assessing the ***safety, mechanism of action*** and therapeutic ***effectiveness*** of an intervention, drug or combination regimen.
  - Well planned
  - Well executed

# What is an investigational product?

- A pharmaceutical form of an active substance or placebo being tested or used as a reference in a clinical trial.
  - Includes products already approved but being used or assembled (formulated or packaged) in a way different from the authorized form; or
  - when being used in a different indication; or
  - to gather new information about an approved agent

# The traditional phases of clinical drug trials

## Phase 1

- Safety/Tolerability
- Define MTD
- Pharmacokinetics
- Often First-in-Human

Small N = 10-30



## Phase 2

- Determine activity
- Add to safety profile
- Optimize dose/schedule for Phase III

Moderate N = 100-200



## Phase 3

- Confirm clinical benefit
- Drug applied to various stages
- Drug used in combination

Large N = 1,000 – 3,000



## Phase 4

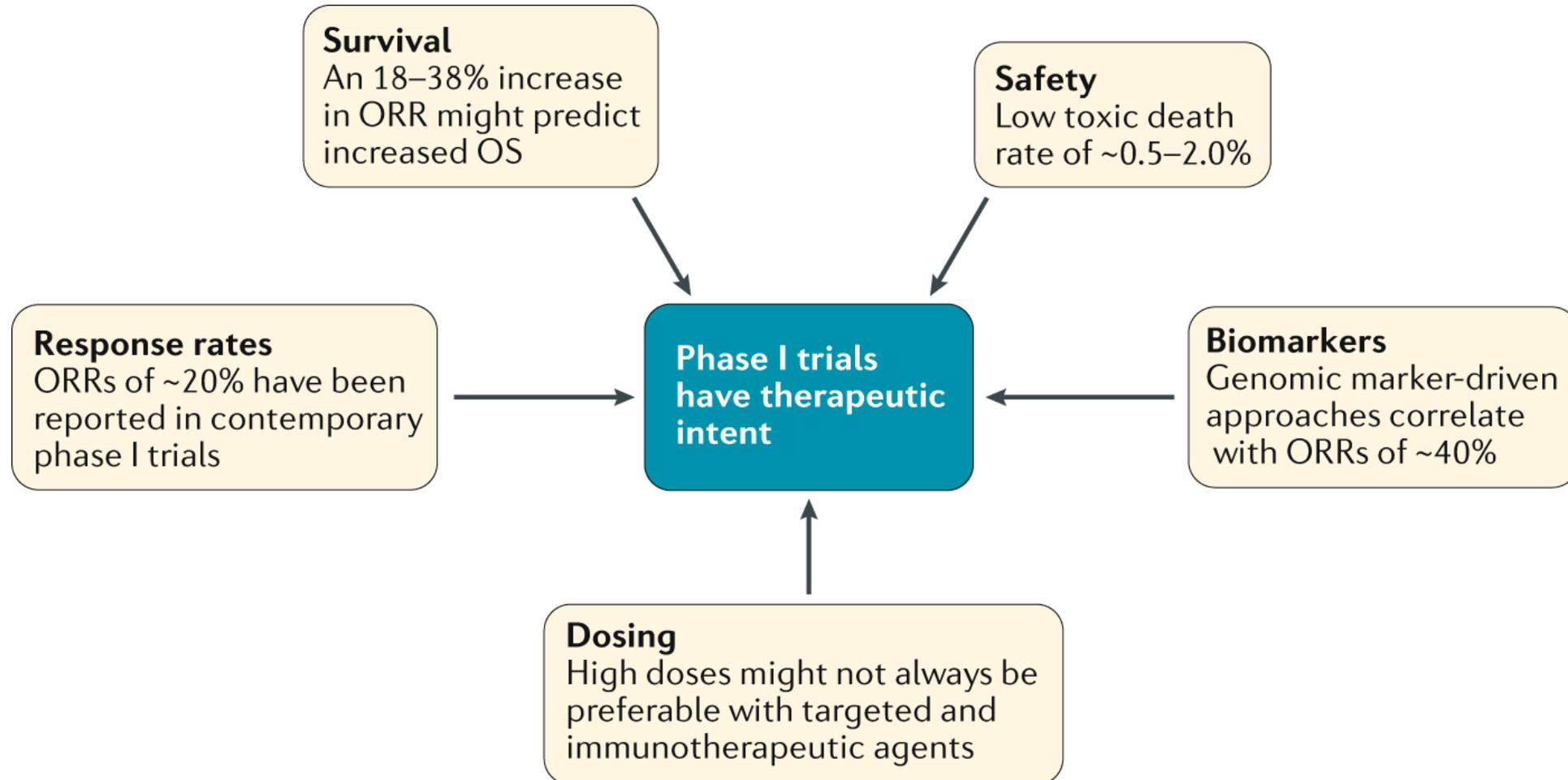
- Post-marketing assessment
- May add information on eligibility, long-term safety and clinical impact, etc.

Variable N = 100 - 500

# Phase 1 vs. Phase 0 Oncology Trials

	Phase 1	Phase 0
Primary Objective	Establish <b><u>toxicity</u></b> profile and MTD	Establish dose range that <b><u>modulates target</u></b> ; for use in later phase 1 and 2 trials
Duration of Dosing	Repeat or multiple cycles until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity	Limited dosing (i.e. one cycle only)
Evaluation for therapeutic benefit	Tumor response usually reported	None
Tumor biopsies	Optional	Required (usually pre- and post-dosing)

# Phase I studies may produce more than just safety data



# Unique aspects of immunotherapy trials

Variables	Standard Cancer Drugs	Immunotherapy Drugs
Mechanism of Action	Directly kills tumor cells	Indirectly kills tumor cells
Kinetics of response	Rapid	May be delayed
Dosing	Typically dose-response related	May not follow usual dose-response relationship
Eligibility	Excludes major medical conditions and CNS disease	May also exclude autoimmune disease but unclear on CNS disease
Duration of treatment / Endpoint evaluation	Typically until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity	Pseudoprogression and hyperprogression have been reported
Adverse events	Usually early onset; on-target effects	May exhibit delayed onset; may include off-target effects
Regulatory considerations	Follows routine IRB approval	May require additional approvals (e.g. IBC)

# Considerations in planning a phase 1 study

- Is the study scientifically and clinically important?
  - Strong scientific justification
  - Addressing an unmet medical need or condition
- Do you have the resources to conduct the trial?
  - GMP manufacturing of investigational product
  - Clinical investigation support (research nurse, data management, statistics)
  - Institutional infrastructure (IRB, IBC, etc.); support for biospecimen collection/processing
- Do you have the time to devote to conducting a clinical trial?
- Do you have an adequate patient population?
  - Consider competing studies and local standards of care and referral patterns
- Are there credible investigators willing to participate?
- Is there financial support for the study?
  - Industry sponsorship
  - NCI support
  - Institutional support

# Phase 1 Clinical Trials Design

# The major method of clinical research: The clinical protocol

- Establishes the key question(s) to be investigated
- Provides guidance for all aspects of human subject management
- Prospectively defines the study objectives and endpoints
- Roadmap for investigators on how to treat and manage patients
- Lists potential safety concerns and describes how patients will be monitored and safety information reported to authorities
- Adherence to written clinical protocol is mandatory
  - Ensures consistency across patients and study sites
  - Allows ethical review and approval of research with experimental agents
  - Provides quality data for regulatory review

# Clinical Protocol Elements

- Title
- Summary
- Introduction or Background
- Study Objectives
- Patient Population (Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria)
- Study Design
- Study Endpoints and Methods of Assessment
- Drugs
- Drug and Study Stopping Rules
- Adverse Events Definition and Reporting
- PK and Biomarker Plan
- Statistical Analysis
- Ethics and Regulatory Requirements
- Data Handling and Integrity
- Informed Consent
- Appendix

# Study Objectives

- Primary endpoint
  - Provides prospective definition of the major study outcome
  - Ideally should be limited to one or only a few endpoints
- Secondary objectives
  - Allows collection of important data to answer additional questions
  - Endpoints usually strictly defined; likely outcome statistically pre-determined
  - Likely to influence further drug development
  - Should not detract from the primary objective
- Exploratory objectives
  - Allows additional data collection
  - Typically is not as rigorous in definition or conduct
  - May or may not influence further drug development
  - Often used when expected outcome is unknown

# Major Goals of Phase 1 clinical studies

## **Toxicity Profile**

- Define dose-limiting toxicity (DLT)
- Define the maximum tolerated dose (MTD)
- Begin definition the adverse events and safety profile of the agent(s)

## **Pharmacokinetic Profile**

- Drug absorption
- Drug distribution
- Metabolic pattern
- Drug excretion

\*Clinical activity may be observed, but is not the primary objective of Phase 1 studies

# Major Goals of Phase 1 IO clinical studies

## Toxicity Profile

- Define dose-limiting toxicity (DLT)
- Define the ***optimal*** tolerated dose (OTD)
- Begin definition the adverse events and safety profile of the agent(s)
- ***May require longer follow-up for delayed events to be seen***

## Pharmacokinetic Profile

- Drug absorption
- Drug distribution
- Metabolic pattern
- Drug excretion
- ***IO may require evidence of immune response, cytokine release, T cell persistence, etc.***
- ***For biologic agents, agent shedding and transmission***

\*Clinical activity may be observed, but is not the primary objective of Phase 1 studies

# Other Objectives in Phase I Clinical Trials

- Evaluate new treatment schedule
- Evaluate new drug combination strategies
- Evaluate new multi—modality regimens
- Define initial clinical response patterns
- Explore potential indications for new drugs
- Explore biomarker associations with prognosis and confirming the proposed mechanism of action (MOA)

# Introduction or Study Background

- Provides information on why the study is being performed
- Includes background on the disease under study and unmet medical need being addressed
- Contains pre-clinical data and any existing clinical data documenting agent safety and efficacy
- Should include alternative options and justification for study and study design
- Must contain relevant and accurate references
- Written at a level where non-oncology physicians can understand

# Patient Population: Eligibility Criteria

- For phase 1 this is usually small (10-30; <100)
- Must consider whether to include all cancer patients or limit to specific cancer(s)
- Must define prior therapy status of subjects
  - Typically exhausted all standard therapy (may differ if combination being considered)
  - Should define refractory (e.g., confirmed PD; duration, etc.)
- Must define adequate organ function for participation
  - Hematologic, hepatic, renal function
  - May also consider other organ system function, e.g., CNS function, etc.
- Must define adequate performance status for participation

# Patient Population: Exclusion Criteria

- Define patients that are not eligible based on safety concerns or situations where patients are unlikely to respond
- CNS disease
- Exposure to and toxicity from previous therapy (i.e., checkpoint blockade)
- Autoimmune disorders
- Prior exposure to hepatitis B and C
- Prior exposure to HIV
- Chronic immunosuppression; corticosteroid use; transplant recipients
- Prior vaccinations
- Co-morbid medical conditions and psychological issues
- Special populations (children, pregnant women, prisoners, etc.)

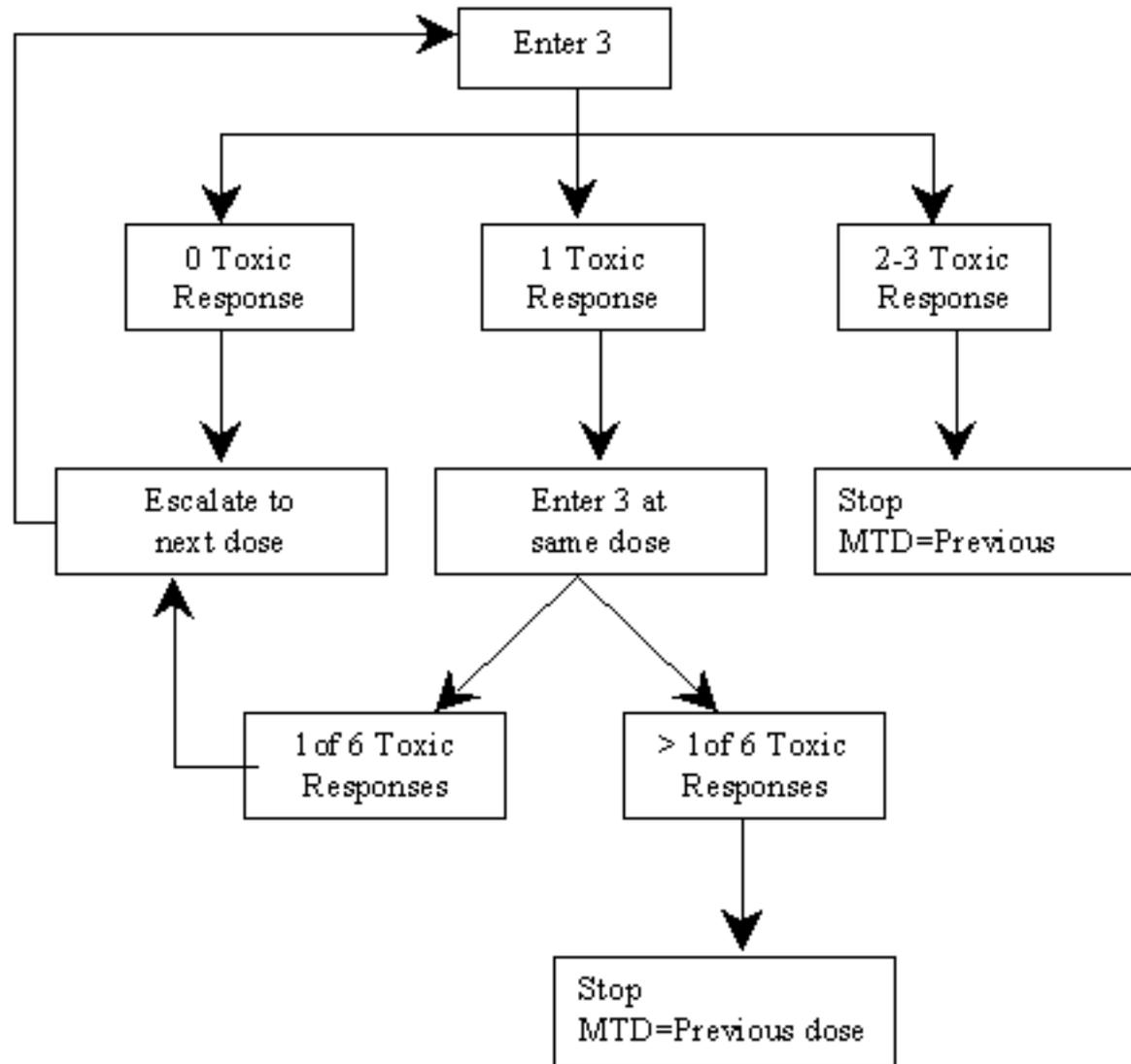
# Eligibility Issues Related to Immunotherapy

Inclusion Criteria	Considerations
CNS Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Since IO may have activity in the CNS, consider including such patients</li><li>• Since IO takes longer for anti-tumor activity may exclude these patients</li></ul>
Prior Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No life-threatening events on prior immunotherapy within drug class</li><li>• Fully recovered from any prior immune-related adverse events</li></ul>
Autoimmune Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IO may exacerbate underlying autoimmunity</li><li>• Autoimmunity may identify patients more likely to respond</li></ul>
Immunosuppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patients on chronic immunosuppression or populations who are suppressed (e.g. transplant recipients) should have clear criteria for eligibility/exclusion</li></ul>
Endocrine Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baseline thyroid function studies recommended</li></ul>
Cardiac Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baseline troponin recommended but follow-up and management not defined</li></ul>
Pulmonary Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally excludes ILD, prior pneumonitis or radiation-induced injury</li><li>• Baseline pO<sub>2</sub> ≥ 92% on room air</li></ul>

# Common **study designs** for phase 1 trials

- Algorithm-based designs, such as standard 3+3 are most common
- Typically, open-label, single arm, non-randomized
- Start at low dose and escalate in cohorts of 3 subjects
- Add additional 3 subjects, if one DLT is observed
- Pre-defined MTD at highest dose; or next lower dose where 2 DLTs occur
- Allows rapid dose finding
- May require adaptation if combination regimen is being assessed

# Standard 3+3 Dose Escalation Design



# Dose escalation design issues

- Starting dose
  - $1/10^{\text{th}}$  the lethal dose in the most sensitive animal model (dose with 10% mortality)
  - Unlikely to cause significant toxicity
  - Pediatric doses often begin at 80% of the adult MTD
- Escalation criteria
  - Use modified Fibonacci scheme
  - 3-5 fold increments
  - Logrhythm dose escalation (e.g., for oncolytic viruses)
- Delay and Stopping rules
  - May wait for follow-up period to assess toxicity prior to dose escalation
  - Pre-define AE criteria for treatment discontinuation and study discontinuation

# Classic Modified Fibonacci Dose Escalation Scheme

## **% Increase Above Preceding Dose:**

Level 1: Starting dose

Level 2: 100% increase from Level 1

Level 3: 67% increase from Level 2

Level 4: 50% increase from Level 3

Level 5: 40% increase from Level 4

Levels 6+: 33% increase from Level 5+

# Alternate Phase 1 Study Designs

- Accelerated designs
  - 1 subject enrolled per dose level until one drug-related grade 2 AE occurs
  - Then resume standard 3+3 design
- Up/Down designs
  - Observe one or two patients
  - If no toxicity, escalate up; If toxicity, de-escalate down
- Intra-patient dose escalation
  - Once a dose level is determined to be safe (no DLTs), the subject can escalate to the next dose level
  - May be useful when prior exposure mitigates toxicity (e.g., seroconversion in oncolytic virus studies)

# Common Phase 1 Study Endpoints

- Safety and Tolerability
  - Dose Limiting Toxicity
  - $\geq$  Grade 3 non-hematologic AEs
  - Grade 4 hematologic AEs (neutropenia > 5 days)
  - May also include criteria for immune-related AEs
- Define the maximum tolerated dose (MTD)
  - Highest dose level at which  $\leq 1/6$  patients develop a DLT
- Pharmacokinetics
  - Drug biodistribution, metabolism and excretion
  - Immune products may also determine immune response, cytokine release, etc.
  - Biologic products may also evaluate agent clearance and transmission

# Study Endpoints

- For most phase I studies, this includes safety profile, defining the MTD and pharmacokinetic analyses
- May also include exploration of clinical activity and confirmation of mechanism of action (e.g., biomarker analyses)
- If clinical endpoints being collected, need to define the method
  - Objective response rate (most common for phase 1)
  - Progression-free survival
  - Time-to-progression
  - Overall survival
  - Landmark survival

**“exploratory”**

# RECIST or immune-related response criteria?

**TABLE 1. RECIST Criteria<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Complete response (CR)</b>	Disappearance of all target lesions. Any pathological lymph nodes (whether target or nontarget) must have reduction in short axis to <10 mm.
<b>Partial response (PR)</b>	At least a 30% decrease in the sum of diameters of target lesions, taking as reference the baseline sum diameters
<b>Progressive disease (PD)</b>	At least a 20% increase in the sum of diameters of target lesions, taking as reference the smallest sum on study (this includes the baseline sum if that is the smallest on study). In addition to the relative increase of 20%, the sum must also demonstrate an absolute increase of at least 5 mm (Note: The appearance of 1 or more new lesions is also considered progression).
<b>Stable disease (SD)</b>	Neither sufficient shrinkage to qualify for PR nor sufficient increase to qualify for PD, taking as reference the smallest sum diameters while on study

## Immune-Related Response Criteria

New, measurable lesions (≥ 5 × 5 mm)	Incorporated into tumor burden
New, nonmeasurable lesions (<5 × 5 mm)	Do not define progression (but preclude irCR)
Non-index lesions	Contribute to defining irCR (complete disappearance required)
CR	Disappearance of all lesions in 2 consecutive observations not less than 4 weeks apart
PR	≥ 50% decrease in tumor burden compared with baseline in 2 observations at least 4 weeks apart
SD	Neither a 50% decrease in tumor burden compared with baseline nor a 25% increase compared with nadir can be established
PD	At least 25% increase in tumor burden compared with nadir (at any single time point) in 2 consecutive observations at least 4 weeks apart

irCR = immune-related response criteria; CR = complete response; PR = partial response; SD = stable disease; PD = progressive disease

Hoos A, et al. *J Natl Cancer Inst.* 2010;102:1388-1397<sup>[7]</sup>; Wolchok JD, et al. *Clin Cancer Res.* 2009;15:7412-7420.<sup>[8]</sup>

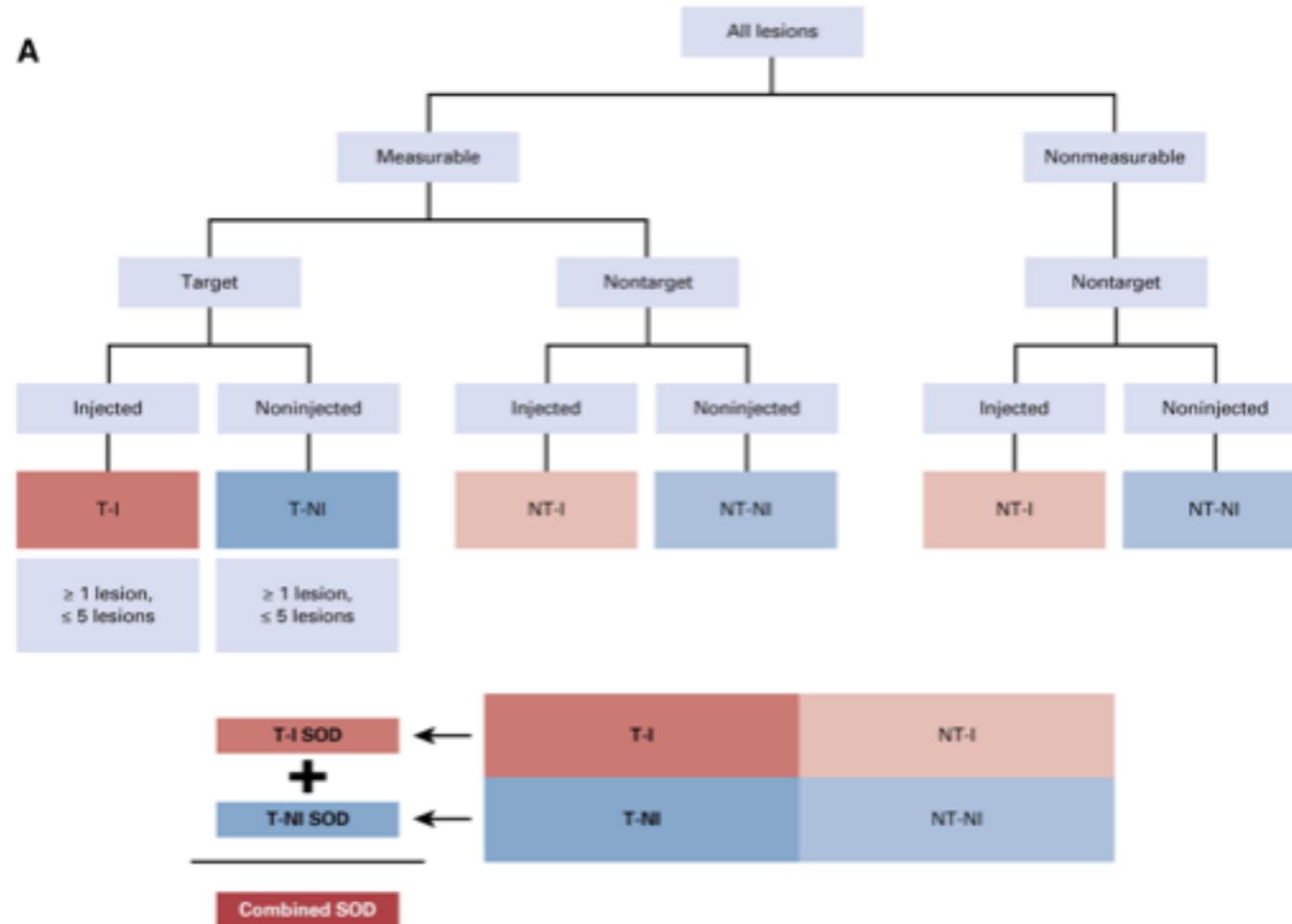
# Other Study Endpoint Criteria for Immunotherapy Trials

**Table 1** Features of criteria for immune-related responses

Features	irRC	irRECIST	iRECIST	imRECIST
Source	Wolchok 2009	Nishino 2013	Seymour 2017	Hodi 2018
Model based on	WHO criteria	irRC & RECIST 1.1	RECIST 1.1	irRC & RECIST 1.1
Dimension	Two	One	Same as irRECIST	Same as irRECIST
Progressive disease definition	25% increase from the nadir	20% increase from the nadir	20% increase from the nadir; results in unconfirmed progressive disease; confirmation is necessary for confirmed progressive disease	Same as irRECIST
New lesion	The presence of new lesion(s) does not define progression; the measurements of the new lesion(s) are included in the sum of the measurements	Same as irRC	The presence of new lesion(s) does not define progression; the measurements of the new lesion(s) are not incorporated in tumor burden	Same as irRC
Confirmation	4 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks; no longer than 8 weeks	4 weeks
Development cohort	Melanoma treated with ipilimumab	Advanced melanoma treated with ipilimumab	Consensus base	Advanced NSCLC and mUC treated with atezolizumab
Outcomes of development cohort	OS	irRC response	Not applicable	OS

irRC, immune-related response criteria; irRECIST, immune-related response evaluation criteria in solid tumors, iRECIST, immune response evaluation criteria in solid tumors; imRECIST, immune-modified response evaluation criteria in solid tumors; WHO, World Health Organization; NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer; mUC, metastatic urothelial carcinoma; OS, overall survival.

# Intratatumoral Recist (itRECIST)



# Which criteria should be used?

## **Considerations:**

- Depends on anticipated mechanism of action
- Has important implications for further development
- May collect both standard and immune-related RECIST
- May use standard RECIST but allow treatment beyond progression
- Helpful to think about how phase 2 and 3 trials might proceed (e.g., what data will be needed to power these studies?)

## **Caveats:**

- irRC allows for pseudo-progression
- irRC may overestimate true ORR
- irRC has NOT been validated
- Unclear if standard and irRC results in significant differences

# A word about imaging

- Response endpoints usually depend on imaging
- Must consider the type of imaging and timepoints for evaluation
- Using SOC timepoints and imaging modalities simple and common
  - Whole body CT scans (chest, abdomen, pelvis and other sites of disease)
  - MRI brain
  - PET may be helpful but usually not used (except as exploratory study)
  - Earlier and/or more frequent imaging allows more opportunity to see a response
- Some tumors may be challenging to monitor
  - Can use biopsy for confirmation (e.g., melanoma, CSCC)
  - Consider biomarker analyses, if validated
- Important point to discuss with regulatory authorities

# Limitations of Phase 1 Clinical Trials

- May not have clinical benefit to participating patients
- Initial patients may be treated at sub-therapeutic doses
- Accrual may be slow (needs healthy but advanced cancer patients)
- Toxicity profile may be influenced by prior therapy
- Inter-patient variability
- Imperfect assessment of MTD
- Studies may end early limiting late or chronic effects of treatment from being documented

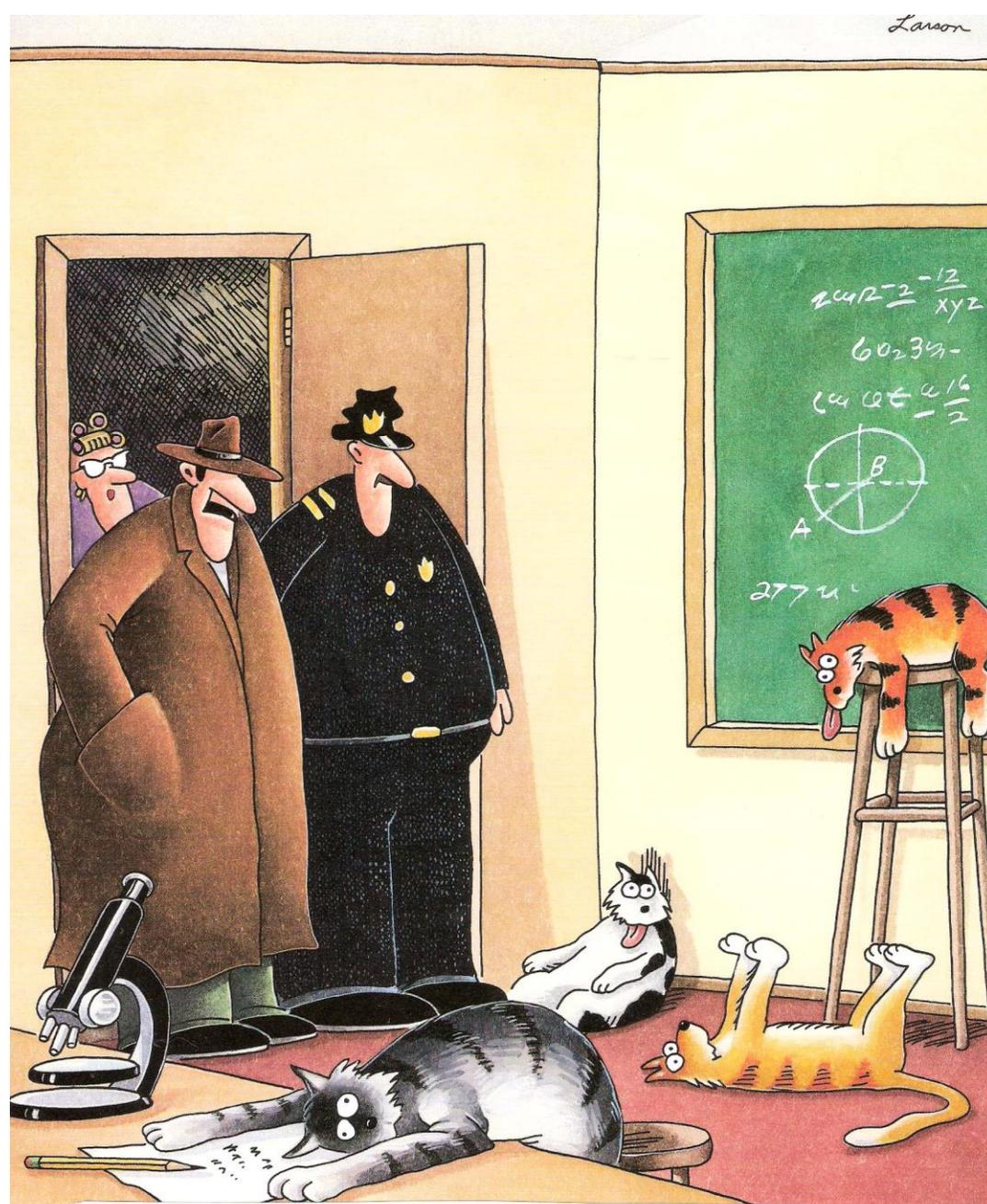
# Informed Consent Elements Unique for Immunotherapy Agents

- Management of immune-related adverse events
  - Include implications of continuing or discontinuing study treatment
  - Potential for long-term toxicity
- Treatment beyond progression
  - May be beneficial and included in some protocols
  - FDA prefers re-consenting with any available data supporting continued treatment

# Websites

- [FDA IND application](#)
- FDA Guidance: [\*Patient-Reported Outcome Measures: Use in Medical Product Development to Support Labeling Claims\*](#)
- FDA Guidance: [Clinical Trial Endpoints for the Approval of Cancer Drugs and Biologics](#)

# Questions?



“Notice all the computations, theoretical scribbles, and lab equipment, Norm. ... Yes, curiosity killed these cats.”