

# Experimental Cancer Treatment Huge Step in Finding Cure for Advanced Rectal Cancer

*Charlotte's own Oncology Specialist of Charlotte practitioners explain the hope this brings all cancer patients*

CHARLOTTE, NC, UNITED STATES, June 13, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dostarlimab for treatment of mismatch repair deficient locally advanced rectal cancer 2022 ASCO meeting and [New England Journal of Medicine publication](#)

A small group in a rectal cancer treatment trial simply had the cancer “disappear” according to a New England Journal of Medicine publication. This exciting, and groundbreaking, trial could be the first step to long term remission for cancer, according to local oncologists, Justin Favaro, M.D., PhD and Nasfat J. Shehadeh, M.D. the owners of [Oncology Specialists of Charlotte \(OSC\)](#).

The experimental treatment, Dostarlimab, is an immunotherapy treatment that turns your immune system on to fight cancer. Basically, instead of the drug fighting the cancer, the treatment sparks your own body's immune system to fight the cancer. It's teaching your body how to cure itself.

PD-1 is a protein found on cells of the immune system and helps the cancer hide from immune cells. Dostarlimab is a treatment that blocks the PD-1 protein thereby turning the immune system on to fight the cancer. Treatment is given intravenously every 3 weeks for 6 months.

In this study, 12 patients who had stage II or III rectal cancer with mismatch repair deficiency (MRD), instead of undergoing chemotherapy and chemoradiation therapy, elected to receive dostarlimab. All 12 patients had no evidence of tumor remaining after 6 months of treatment.

Patients who have low lying rectal cancer with MRD have tumors that have many mutations and appear very foreign to the body. We know that immunotherapy works well to turn on the immune system to kill these foreign appearing cancer cells.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Patients who have locally advanced rectal cancer (stage II or III rectal cancer, i.e. rectal cancer that pushed through the wall of the rectum or that had spread to local lymph nodes) typically are treated with chemotherapy, followed by chemotherapy concurrent with radiation therapy.

If there is still a tumor left behind after treatment, then the patient will undergo surgery to remove the remaining tumor and the surrounding lymph nodes. The surgery often will involve diverting the colon into a colostomy bag.

Treatment with chemotherapy and radiation to the pelvis and possible surgery all result in lifelong alteration in quality of life. If patients have surgery, they never have normal bowel movements as they are stools diverted into the colostomy bag for the rest of their life. Even without surgery, patients can suffer short-term and long-term changes in the pelvis caused by the treatment, including sexual dysfunction, urinary difficulties, and infertility.

Five to ten percent of rectal tumors have mismatch repair deficiency (MRD). The tumor cells have difficulty correcting mistakes made during DNA replication. The end result is that there are many mutations within the DNA of these tumors, resulting in the cells appearing very foreign to the body.

#### RESULTS WITH DOSTARLIMAB

Patients will continue to be observed but hopes are high with this new discovery.

Dostarlimab is a huge advance in the treatment of stage II or III rectal cancer that has mismatch repair deficiency (approximately 5 to 10% of rectal cancer cases). These patients had a complete resolution of the cancer and avoided the long-term side effects of chemotherapy, radiation, and possible surgery. These patients were followed up for least 6 months, time will tell if the benefit of the treatment remains long-term. We look forward to future research which hopefully will allow similar treatments to be applied to all patients with cancer.

#### FROM THE OSC DOCTORS

This matters for our local patients because we offer clinical research opportunities at our practice. We believe that getting curious about new ways to treat all cancers allows us to provide our patients with the best possible outcome. The doctors can provide direct data and case studies to assist with how this story will impact our region.

Connect with Dr. Favaro at 704-975-6090 or 980-495-3774.

Connect with Dr. Shehadeh at 419-279-3044.

Arden McLaughlin

Definita

+1 7049415564

[email us here](#)

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