New tool helps doctors decide when to stop medicines

After BMT, many people need immune suppression for more than 5 years

A new online calculator helps doctors decide when it’s safest to stop immune suppression medicines after blood or marrow transplant (BMT). This is important because, while these medicines protect against graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), they also increase the risk of infections.

BMT may cure leukemia and other blood cancers. It replaces unhealthy immune cells with healthy cells donated by another person. However, the donated cells may attack organs like skin, digestive tract, or lungs. This is called GVHD. It can be severe and can affect quality of life.

Researchers at BMT CTN studied the records of 827 people who got BMT. After 5 years, about 20% of people (2 in 10 people) stopped taking immune suppression medicines without getting GVHD. These people were more likely to have:

• received bone marrow, rather than peripheral blood.
• taken immune suppression medicines longer before they stopped.

Contrary to past beliefs, staying on the medicines was not linked to cancer coming back.

Researchers developed an online tool for doctors, Landmark Prediction of Immune Suppression Discontinuation. The tool predicts a person’s chance of safely stopping medicines at that time.

Ask your doctor

• What medicines are right for me?
• How long should I expect to take my immune suppression medicines after BMT?

Source