Enhanced understanding of tumor biology has led to the identification of molecular pathways that are susceptible to pharmacologic targeting. Since 1990, this paradigm has changed the face of cancer therapy. For example, the recognition of HER2 as a driver of breast cancer proliferation triggered the development of the monoclonal antibody trastuzumab (Slamon et al., 1987, 2001; Slamon, Leyland-Jones, & Shak, 1998). In renal cell carcinoma (RCC), modulation of the von Hippel-Lindau gene leads to overproduction of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), which in turn triggers aberrant angiogenesis (blood vessel growth and formation) (Kim & Kaelin, 2004). To date, four drugs targeting VEGF-mediated signaling have been approved for the treatment of metastatic RCC on the basis of randomized, phase III studies: bevacizumab, sorafenib, sunitinib, and pazopanib. Pazopanib was approved in 2009 for this disease on the basis of a phase III clinical trial demonstrating a superior progression-free survival compared to placebo in 435 patients with either treatment-naive or cytokine-refractory disease. The trial offered insight related to the toxicity profile associated with this agent. The most common clinical adverse events are diarrhea, hypertension, nausea, anorexia, and vomiting. With respect to laboratory adverse events, hepatotoxicity represents a specific concern with pazopanib. Oncology nurses play a critical role in counseling patients regarding the toxicity profile and management of adverse events in pazopanib treatment.

At a Glance

- Pazopanib is an orally available receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitor, with effects against vascular endothelial growth factor receptor, platelet-derived growth factor receptor, and c-Kit.
- Pazopanib exhibits activity against a wide variety of malignancies, including renal cell carcinoma, melanoma, and cancers of the breast, prostate, colon, and lung.
- Nurses must have a working knowledge of the benefits and potential side effects of pazopanib to ensure that therapeutic goals are achieved.