Denileukin Diftitox as Novel Targeted Therapy in Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma

Pamela L. Walker, RN, OCN®, and Nam H. Dang, MD, PhD

Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (NHL) is a complex group of hematologic malignancies. The majority are B-cell lineage, with 10%–20% arising from T-cell lineage. Detailed knowledge of the subtypes and staging of NHL is essential to plan treatment and provide effective management of treatment-related side effects. Although numerous regimens have demonstrated efficacy in the treatment of NHL, some subtypes of lymphomas generally are not curable. The recent development of targeted therapies such as denileukin diftitox (Ontak®, Ligand Pharmaceuticals, Inc., San Diego, CA) has resulted in potentially significant advances in the treatment of NHL. Oncology nurses must gain a better understanding of the unique mechanism of action of this agent and its side effects to successfully manage patients being treated with this novel therapy.

Key Words: lymphoma, non-Hodgkin; fatigue; pruritus; vascular leak syndrome

Low-Grade B-Cell Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma

Several subtypes of NHL belong to the low-grade or indolent B-cell NHL classification; the most common is follicular lymphoma (FL), which comprises 25%–40% of all adult lymphomas (Seng & Peterson, 1997). Disease often presents with asymptomatic, chronically waxing and waning lymphadenopathy detected by patients or healthcare providers.