



UNC
KIDNEY CENTER

Podcast Transcript:

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“Is ANCA testing a good marker of disease activity?”

ANCA testing as a marker of disease activity, and are there biomarkers that are good correlates of disease? I'm going to break your question into two parts. In 1986, when we discovered Myeloperoxidase ANCA and then very quickly, the international community realized that there was this other Proteinase 3 ANCA marker, we were scooped on that one. I thought ANCA testing was going to be wonderful—the best thing since sliced bread. I thought it was going to mark disease activity perfectly, I was just euphoric. Then reality struck, and I was sure this was not a marker of anything. And then, over the last decade or so, I'll tell you where we've come.

I think that ANCA testing is a great marker for diagnosis. That if it's absent in the time of diagnosis, you really have to ask yourself the question, What's the disease? I think it, in some people, correlates with disease activity very well. So there are individuals, some of them sitting here, in whom the ANCA titer correlates with disease activity perfectly. There are other people who have persistently positive titers, and who are in clinical remission. Although I always worry that at times, for example of infection, their disease may flare. There's very few individuals who have a negative ANCA, who are flaring. That's the place where the test actually helps the best.

But I'm going to divide your question into the second half. We are constantly looking for biomarkers. In fact, many of you sitting in this room have participated in studies. We are now looking at the gene product, Myeloperoxidase or Proteinase 3 in the white blood cell, and that turns out to probably be a more sensitive marker of a flare than does the antibody titer to it. And we're honing in on whether there are a cluster of three or four of these gene products that are a good biomarker, and, in fact, I think—very soon we're going to decide that's a better clinical test. That's one thing. Remember, these are diseases in which your immune system is reacting to something and following your own B cells—the cells that produce the antibody, again may be a better biomarker. So we're honing in on better biomarkers of disease activity. But I'm trying to get enough data for the Food and Drug Administration to actually agree that measuring a gene product is better than measuring an antibody, and they're not ready to say yes.