EGFR mutation prevalence in Asia-Pacific and Russian patients with advanced NSCLC of adenocarcinoma and non-adenocarcinoma histology: The IGNITE study

Baohui Han, Sergei Tjulandin, Koichi Hagiwara, Nicola Normanno, Laksmi Wulandari, Konstantin Laktionov, Achmad Hudoyo, Yong He, Yi-Ping Zhang, Meng-Zhao Wang, Chien Ying Liu, Marianne Ratcliffe, Rose McCormack, Martin Reck

Department of Respiratory Medicine, Shanghai Chest Hospital, Jiao Tong University, 241 Huaihai West Road, Shanghai, 200030, China
Department of Clinical Pharmacology and Chemotherapy, N. N. Blokhin Russian Cancer Research Center, 24 Kashirskoye Shosse, Moscow 115478, Russia
Division of Pulmonary Medicine, Department of Medicine, Jichi Medical University, 3311-1 Yakushiji, Shimotsuke-shi, Tochigi, 329-0498, Japan
Cell Biology and Biotherapy Unit, Istituto Nazionale Tumori “Fondazione Giovanni Pascale”, IRCCS, Via Mariano Semmola, 80131 Napoli, Italy
Department of Pulmonology, Dr Soetomo General Hospital, No. 6-8 Surabaya, Jawa Timur, 60285 Indonesia
Department of Clinical Biotechnology, N. N. Blokhin Russian Cancer Research Center, 24 Kashirskoye Shosse, Moscow 115478, Russia
Department of Pulmonology and Respiratory Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia – Persahabatan Hospital, 2nd Floor Jl. Persahabatan Raya No. 1, Rawamangun, Jakarta 13230, Indonesia
Department of Respiratory Medicine, Daping Hospital, The Third Military Medical University, No.10 Daping Changjiang Branch Road, Chongqing, 400042, China
Department of Chemotherapy, Zhejiang Cancer Hospital and Key Laboratory Diagnosis and Treatment Technology on Thoracic Oncology, 38 Guangzi Road, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310022, China
Department of Respiratory Medicine, Peking Union Medical College Hospital, Peking Union Medical College and Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, No. 1 Shuaifuyuan Street, Dongcheng District, Beijing, 100730, China
Division of Thoracic Medicine, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Chang Gung University, 199 Tung Hwa North Road, Taipei 105, Taiwan
AstraZeneca, Mereside, Alderley Park, Macclesfield, SK10 4TG, United Kingdom
Department of Thoracic Oncology, LungClinic Grosshadelf, Airway Research Center North (ARCN), Member of the German Centre for Lung Research (DZL), Wohrendamm 80, 22927 Grosshadelf, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Limited understanding exists of epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) mutation frequency in less common subgroups of advanced non-small-cell lung cancer (aNSCLC) (e.g. squamous cell carcinoma [SCC]), and to what extent local practices exclude patients from EGFR testing based on their clinical characteristics.

Materials and methods: IGNITE (non-comparative/-interventional; NCT01788163) was conducted in 90 centres (Asia-Pacific/Russia). Eligible patients: local/metastatic aNSCLC; chemotherapy-naïve, newly-diagnosed/recurrent disease after resection; ineligible for curative treatment. Patients provided a tissue/cytology (all) and a blood plasma (China/Russia/South Korea/Taiwan) sample. Primary endpoint: EGFR mutation frequency in aNSCLC patients (adenocarcinoma [ADC]/non-ADC), as per local practices.

Results: 3382 patients were enrolled. EGFR mutation frequencies for evaluable tissue/cytology samples in Asia-Pacific and Russian patients: 49.3% (862/1749) and 18.0% (90/500) for ADC tumours; 14.1% (74/525) and 3.7% (15/402) for non-ADC; 9.9% (40/403) and 3.7% (13/349) for SCC. Of Russian patients with SCC tumours harbouring common, activating EGFR mutations, 6/9 were never-/former-smokers. Mutation status concordance between 2581 matched tissue/cytology and plasma samples: 80.5% (sensitivity 46.9%, specificity 95.6%).

Conclusion: EGFR mutation testing should be considered in all Asian aNSCLC patients. Also, as activating EGFR factor receptor; LNA, locked nucleic acid; NE, neuroendocrine; NSCC, non-small-cell carcinoma; NSCLC, non-small-cell lung cancer; NPV, negative predictive value; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; PNA, peptide nucleic acid; PPV, positive predictive value; SCC, squamous cell carcinoma; SCCA, small-cell carcinoma; TKI, tyrosine kinase inhibitor; TTF-1, thyroid transcription factor 1; WHO, World Health Organization

Abbreviations: ADC, adenocarcinoma; aNSCLC, advanced non-small-cell lung cancer; ASR, age-standardised rate; ctDNA, circulating free tumour-derived DNA; EGFR, epidermal growth factor receptor; LNA, locked nucleic acid; NE, neuroendocrine; NSCC, non-small-cell carcinoma; NSCLC, non-small-cell lung cancer; NPV, negative predictive value; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; PNA, peptide nucleic acid; PPV, positive predictive value; SCC, squamous cell carcinoma; SCCA, small-cell carcinoma; TKI, tyrosine kinase inhibitor; TTF-1, thyroid transcription factor 1; WHO, World Health Organization

⁎ Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: xkyyhan@gmail.com, hanxkyy@aliyun.com (B. Han).

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EGFR mutations were observed in a small number of Caucasian squamous NSCLC patients, testing here may be appropriate, particularly in those with no/remote smoking history. Circulating free tumour-derived DNA is feasible for mutation analysis employing well-validated and sensitive methods, when tumour samples are unavailable.

1. Introduction

Statistics indicate that, in Asia, lung cancer is the most common cancer in men (age-standardised rate [ASR; per 100,000] 35.2) and the third most common cancer in women (ASR 12.7) [1]. Similarly, in Russia, lung cancer is the most common cancer in men (ASR 51.4) and the eighth most common cancer in women (ASR 6.8) [1].

Adenocarcinoma (ADC) is among the most common histological subtypes of non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) [2]. NSCLC of ADC histology is reported to be associated with mutations in the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) gene in approximately 14–19% of Western patients and 40–48% of Asian patients (corresponding data for non-ADC: 3% and 8%, respectively) [3,4]. Data for Russia specifically have indicated that EGFR mutations may occur in 13–20% of Russian patients with NSCLC of ADC histology [5,6].

While EGFR tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs) specifically target the protein encoded by the EGFR oncogene [7,8], it is now accepted that response to EGFR TKIs is mainly limited to patients with tumours harbouring activating, targetable, EGFR mutations (most common: exon 19 deletion or L858R mutation) compared with wild-type EGFR [9]. Furthermore, EGFR TKIs have demonstrated superior efficacy to doublet chemotherapy in patients with EGFR mutation-positive advanced NSCLC (aNSCLC) [10–15].

Current clinical guidelines (National Comprehensive Cancer Network, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [16–18]) and several working groups [19,20] now advocate mutation testing of tumour samples from patients with non-squamous aNSCLC (and in specific patients with squamous NSCLC [e.g. never-smokers]; European Society for Medical Oncology guidelines) [21] to confirm their suitability for EGFR TKI treatment. Prior to the association with EGFR mutation-positive status and response to EGFR TKIs, certain clinical characteristics associated with a high frequency of activating, sensitising EGFR mutations (female gender, Asian ethnicity, never-smokers, and ADC histology [3,22]) drove patient selection for mutation testing [23]. However, it is now acknowledged that EGFR mutations may occur in any patient [24,25]. Indeed, the number of facilities that conduct mutation testing has risen, reflecting increased clinician demand [26,27].

As the availability of testing becomes more widespread, understanding of the frequency of EGFR mutations (particularly in groups that have not previously been widely tested) needs to be updated. Moreover, it is important to assess real-world diagnostic practices to identify areas for improvement, as the methodologies used are highly diverse [16–18,21,26,28], with differences in tumour sampling and EGFR mutation testing methodologies not well-documented. Optimisation testing methodologies for alternative sample types are, therefore, under investigation, such as circulating free tumour-derived DNA (ctDNA) obtained from blood serum or plasma [4,10,29,30]. Overall, this knowledge will help to ensure that as many patients as possible have access to mutation testing and are treated appropriately based on the molecular characteristics of their disease.

1.1. Objectives

The large, multinational, diagnostic, non-comparative, non-interventional IGNITE study (NCT01788163) assessed EGFR mutation frequency in patients with aNSCLC of ADC or non-ADC histologies in a real-world diagnostic setting.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and patients

Eligible patients (aged ≥18 years) had newly diagnosed, locally advanced (not eligible for curative treatment)/metastatic treatment-naive NSCLC, or had recurrent disease and surgical resection with/without adjuvant chemotherapy. Provision of a diagnostic tissue/cytology sample was mandatory upon inclusion for all patients, and provision of a routine blood (plasma) sample was mandatory for patients from China, Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan only (other countries included were Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand).

The primary endpoint of IGNITE was EGFR mutation frequency in patients with aNSCLC of ADC and non-ADC histologies. Secondary endpoints included: EGFR mutation testing practices; level of concordance in EGFR mutation status between matched tissue/cytology and blood (plasma) samples; correlations between EGFR mutation status and demographic data/disease status; and treatment decisions following EGFR mutation testing (not reported).

All patients provided written, informed consent. Study approval was obtained from independent ethics committees at each institution. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, the International Conference on Harmonisation/Good Clinical Practice, applicable regulatory requirements for non-interventional studies, and AstraZeneca’s policy on bioethics and human biological samples.

2.2. Procedures

EGFR mutation testing and results data for tumour samples obtained prior to enrolment in IGNITE were used where available. For tests conducted in IGNITE, diagnostic tissue/cytology samples underwent EGFR mutation testing as per local practices, following histopathologic review (World Health Organization [WHO] classification) to ensure that samples were adequate for use. Plasma samples were obtained from patients from China, Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan only, as countries deemed most likely to provide sufficient plasma samples to support the concordance analysis: these patients provided 10-mL blood samples, which were processed to plasma, frozen and transported to designated laboratories for testing. In all countries, academic, hospital, or commercial laboratories were utilised for tissue/cytology-based testing; central/regional expert laboratories were utilised for blood (plasma)-based testing.

2.3. Outcomes

Testing methodologies, sample types and availability, and testing turnaround time/success rate/mutation detection rate were captured to assess EGFR mutation testing practices. EGFR mutation frequency (primary endpoint) was assessed overall, by ADC and non-ADC histologies, and by country/region. EGFR mutation concordance between matched tissue/cytology and plasma samples was assessed via: concordance rate; sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), and negative predictive value (NPV); and exact two-sided 95% confidence interval.

2.4. Statistical analyses

EGFR mutation testing practices (enrolled population) and EGFR mutation frequency (evaluable tumour [tissue/cytology]/plasma
EGFR mutation status concordance between matched tissue/cytology and plasma samples was calculated for the evaluable population (all eligible patients with known tumour [tissue/cytology] and plasma samples was calculated for the evaluable population.

The correlation between EGFR mutation status and demographic characteristics and disease status was analysed using a multivariate logistic regression model of characteristics and disease status was analysed using a multivariate sample EGFR (all eligible patients with known tumour [tissue/cytology] and plasma samples was calculated for the evaluable population.

It was estimated that 2500 patients from Asia-Pacific and 1000 patients from Russia would need to be tested to give similar precision of the mutation frequency estimate in patients with aNSCLC of non-ADC histology.

From 27 February, 2013 to 25 August, 2014, 3382 patients were enrolled (Fig. 1). Demographics and baseline characteristics were generally well-balanced between patients with data available for tissue/cytology and plasma samples (Supplementary Table 2).

Tissue/cytology samples were mostly collected during current diagnosis (Asia-Pacific 93.7%, Russia 74.1%; Supplementary Fig. 1A), and sample tissue was most often derived from the primary tumour (Asia-Pacific 67.1%, Russia 80.3%; Supplementary Fig. 1B). The majority of samples were collected by bronchoscopy (Asia-Pacific 68.3%/14.1%, Russia 79.8%/10.2%; Supplementary Fig. 1C). The common sampling sites were the lungs/lymph nodes (Asia-Pacific 93.7%, Russia 80.3%; Supplementary Fig. 1A), the most common: 37.5%, with QIAGEN therascreen® EGFR RGQ PCR Kit [QIAGEN, Manchester, UK]; Fig. 2A). With regards to plasma sample testing, methodologies were relatively limited in number and generally similar in type across both regions (Fig. 2B).

The median EGFR test turnaround time for tissue/cytology samples was 6 days for Asia-Pacific (range: 1–197 days) and 9 days for Russia (range: 1–401 days). Across Asia-Pacific countries, the median test turnaround was generally within 2 weeks, aside from Thailand where it was 70.0 days (range: 4–197 days). Tumour mutation testing success rates for Asia-Pacific and Russia were 99.5% (2291/2302) and 98.7% (924/936), respectively. Tumour mutation tests were not performed on samples of 144 patients. The most common reason for not testing, where provided, was insufficient material provided for the test (Asia-Pacific 92.6% [100/108 responses], Russia 66.7% [24/36 responses]).

3.3. EGFR mutation frequency

For tissue/cytology samples, the overall EGFR mutation frequencies in Asia-Pacific and Russian patients with tumours of ADC histology were 49.3% and 18.0%, respectively; and for non-ADC, 14.1% and 3.7%, respectively (Table 1). Corresponding data for plasma samples generally reflected a similar pattern, albeit with lower overall mutation frequencies (Table 1).

EGFR mutation status by non-ADC subtype in tissue/cytology samples is presented in Table 2. EGFR mutation frequency in squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) was 9.9% (40/403) in Asia-Pacific and 3.7% (13/349) in Russia; and in non-small-cell carcinoma (NSCC; not otherwise specified) was 27.5% (19/69) and 7.4% (2/27) respectively. Also in the non-ADC group, 21 patients had tumours classified as NSCC with squamous cell and ADC patterns; in Asia-Pacific, 53.3% (8/15) of these tumour samples carried EGFR mutations.

Across IGNITE, 67 patients (54 Asian) with EGFR mutation-positive tumours were histologically classified as having SCC, or NSCLC with a squamous component. Of these, 74.6% (50/67) were male, 34.3% (23/67) were never-smokers and 31.3% (21/67) were current smokers. Of 9 Russian patients with activating exon 19 deletions or L858R mutations in tumours histologically classified as having SCC/NSCLC with a squamous component, 66.7% (6/9) were never- or former-smokers (3/9 current smokers).

Of interest, where relevant testing was locally conducted, 43.9% (351/799) of thyroid transcription factor 1 (TTF-1)-positive and 9.8% (25/256) of TTF-1-negative tissue/cytology samples were EGFR mutation-positive.

Fig. 1. Patient flow diagram.
3.4. EGFR mutation subtypes

In the majority of tissue/cytology samples from Asia-Pacific patients with tumours of ADC histology, activating exon 19 deletions (48.7%) and L858R mutations (42.5%) were observed (Table 1). In corresponding Russian samples, as has been seen previously for Caucasian populations, the proportion of exon 19 deletions was substantially higher (58.9%) versus L858R mutations (25.6%). In non-ADC tissue/cytology samples, these common mutations were observed in 94.6% of Asia-Pacific EGFR mutation-positive patients (exon 19 deletion: 39.2%; L858R mutation: 55.4%); and in only 60.0% of Russian EGFR mutation-positive patients (exon 19 deletion: 40.0%; L858R mutation: 20.0%). Corresponding data for plasma samples are reported in Table 1.

Considering overall tissue/cytology sample EGFR mutation subtype frequencies, rare mutations were more frequently seen in Russia versus Asia-Pacific (Supplementary Table 3). In Russia, a total of 19.1% of mutation-positive tissue/cytology samples (21/110 mutation subtypes detected) were neither exon 19 deletions nor L858R-only mutations; in Asia-Pacific samples, the corresponding percentage was 8.6% (81/941). Among the Russian rare mutations, eight were double mutations including exon 19 deletions, and five were designated as R836R.

3.5. Concordance of EGFR mutation status between matched tissue/cytology and plasma samples

Overall mutation status concordance was 80.5% (sensitivity 46.9%, specificity 95.6%, PPV 82.6%, NPV 80.0%) (Table 3). The sensitivity (30.3%) and specificity (93.5%) were noticeably lower in Russia compared with Asia-Pacific (49.6% and 97.2%, respectively).
male, and current or ex-smokers. This is a notable finding in a group of patients with NSCLC with rare EGFR mutations (15.6% [14/90] ADC tumour samples and 26.7% [4/15] NSCC, NSCC with NE morphology (positive NE markers) 0 (0.0) 10 (0.7) 0 (0.0) 0 (0.0) NSCC with squamous cell and ADC patterns 8 (0.9) 7 (0.5) 0 (0.0) 6 (0.7) Poorly differentiated NSCLC with spinal and/or giant cell carcinoma 1 (0.1) 5 (0.4) 0 (0.0) 6 (0.7) Interestingly, a significant correlation was also observed between being aged ≤ 65 years and having an EGFR mutation-positive plasma sample (p = 0.0009), independent of other covariates. In addition, EGFR mutations were observed in some TTF-1-negative samples.

Together, these results support mutation testing in all Asian patients with NSCLC. For Caucasian patients of non-ADC histology, testing may warrant consideration on a case-by-case basis, particularly in never- or former-smokers. Moreover, when reporting EGFR mutations to clinicians, the nature of the mutation and whether it is activating and/or targetable by TKIs should be made clear, to assist with appropriate treatment decisions. Whilst the functional consequences of unusual or rare EGFR mutations are currently less well understood when compared with exon 19 deletions and L858R mutations, consistent reporting of these may assist in closing this gap in knowledge.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic/disease status</th>
<th>Tissue/cytology (China/South Korea/Russia/Taiwan only)</th>
<th>Plasma (Asia-Pacific only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EGFR Demographic/disease status</td>
<td>OR: 2.084 (95% CI: 1.525, 2.848) p &lt; 0.0001</td>
<td>OR: 2.084 (95% CI: 1.525, 2.848) p &lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADC vs. non-ADC</td>
<td>375/1714 (21.9) vs. 98/854 (14.0) 0.0001</td>
<td>244/981 (25.3) vs. 128/803 (16.0) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific vs. Russia</td>
<td>571/2108 (26.0) vs. 940/2414 (38.6) 0.0001</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never- vs. ever-smoker</td>
<td>705/1332 (52.1) vs. 366/1663 (21.9) 0.0001</td>
<td>234/981 (25.3) vs. 128/803 (16.0) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female vs. male</td>
<td>592/2289 (26.3) vs. 909/2290 (40.4) 0.0001</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater number of organs with metastases</td>
<td>167/2133 (14.9) vs. 227/2163 (10.4) N/A</td>
<td>167/2133 (14.9) vs. 227/2163 (10.4) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGFR mutation status</td>
<td>952/2289 (26.3) vs. 909/2290 (40.4) 0.0001</td>
<td>167/2133 (14.9) vs. 227/2163 (10.4) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ≤ vs. &gt; 65 years old</td>
<td>1.386 (95% CI: 1.242, 1.546) &lt; 0.0001</td>
<td>1.386 (95% CI: 1.242, 1.546) &lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: ADC, adenocarcinoma; CI, confidence interval; EGFR, epidermal growth factor receptor; N/A, not available; NSCLC, non-small-cell lung cancer; OR, odds ratio.

5. Conclusions

These real-world data indicate that EGFR mutation testing should be considered in all Asian patients with an NSCLC of ADC or non-ADC histology. Also, as activating EGFR mutations were observed in a small number of Caucasian patients with squamous NSCLC, testing here may be appropriate, particularly in those who have no history or a remote history of smoking. Continued education is required to ensure accurate testing and clarity in reporting of relevant EGFR mutations in some regions. ctDNA is a feasible, suitable sample for mutation analysis when testing. Notably, for three patients with exon 19 deletions in plasma, exon 19 had not been screened in the tumour sample. This is of concern, as exon 19 deletions can predict response to TKIs and should be tested for routinely in first-line anNSCLC.

A root-cause analysis of the plasma sample mutation testing methodologies of the Russian laboratories was conducted in order to understand possible reasons for the low sensitivity and specificity yielded. It was confirmed that plasma processing and handling in Russia had been performed in accordance with the laboratory manual, ruling out pre-analytical factors as contributors to the low sensitivity and specificity, several issues were found with subsequent DNA extraction and analysis. Regarding sensitivity, none of the Russian laboratories used a DNA extraction kit specifically optimised for ctDNA (i.e. suitable to detect low-concentration fragmented DNA found in the blood). Data from the ASSESS study [4] showed that use of a non-optimised DNA extraction method can significantly lower the sensitivity of plasma testing. Furthermore, a high proportion of rare mutations was detected in the Russian tumour samples (e.g. R836R) that are not targeted by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based methods used for ctDNA testing, thus also reducing the apparent sensitivity of plasma testing. Regarding specificity, the proportion of false positives differed between laboratories. The laboratory with the highest proportion of false positives used a peptide nucleic acid-locked, nucleic acid PCR-based method, with no lowest cut-off for percentage of mutant ctDNA. In the absence of prospective clinical studies assessing whether these extremely low levels of mutant ctDNA predict response to TKIs, it is recommended that a plasma cut-off be defined that maximises specificity relative to tumour mutations, which have been shown to predict response.

The IGNITE study revealed substantial differences in sampling within and between Asia-Pacific and Russia. In particular, biopsy sample origin varied considerably within Asia-Pacific: a higher proportion of samples in Thailand were from metastases (64.9% [61/94]) compared with 38.0% (19/50) in Malaysia and < 30% in other countries. Associated with this, a higher proportion of samples in Thailand were from lymph nodes (27.7% [26/94]) compared with other countries (< 17%). Needle biopsy was common in Indonesia (51.0% [154/302]) and Thailand (40.4% [38/94]), but rare in other countries (< 20%). A wider range of EGFR mutation testing methodologies were also observed across Asia-Pacific, particularly for tissue/cytology samples. The results of the IGNITE study demonstrate that standardisation of the practical aspects of real-world mutation testing, particularly with regards to plasma-based ctDNA testing (highlighted by the anomalous IGNITE Russian plasma data), does still warrant further guidance and improvement.

With the increase in studies evaluating more sensitive mutation testing methodologies, there is the opportunity for global and local guidelines to be developed to facilitate a consensus on optimal mutation analysis of both tissue/cytology and plasma samples. Notably, ctDNA mutation testing offers the potential of real-time monitoring of tumour mutation status during TKI treatment via regular and minimally invasive blood sampling [41]. This may facilitate detection of TKI resistance-inducing mutations, such as T790 M [9], for which third-generation TKIs that target such mutations are available in the United States and European Union [42,43].
tumour samples are unavailable, if robust and sensitive mutation testing methods are employed; local in-house assays must be thoroughly validated before use in a clinical setting. Consensus of optimal tumour and plasma-based testing methods will ensure that patients receive the most appropriate treatments to address the molecular characteristics of their disease.

Conflict of interest statement

BH has participated in speakers’ bureau for, and has received consulting fees from, AstraZeneca, has participated in speakers’ bureau for AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Sanofi-Aventis. KH has participated in speakers’ bureau for AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Chugai Pharmaceuticals, and has a patent with LSI Medience. NN has received grants, research, and consulting fees from AstraZeneca. LW has participated in speakers’ bureau for AstraZeneca and has received consulting fees from Boehringer Ingelheim. XL has participated in speakers’ bureau for Eli Lilly, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Boehringer Ingelheim, and BMS. AH, YH, Y-PZ, M-ZW, and CYL have no relationships to disclose. MR and RM are employed by, and have stock or other ownership of, AstraZeneca. MR has participated in speakers’ bureau for, and has received consulting fees from, Hoffmann-La Roche, Lilly, BMS, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Boehringer Ingelheim, and MSD, and has received consulting fees from Daiichi-Sankyo.

Role of the funding source

This study was sponsored by AstraZeneca and co-ordinated by Worldwide Clinical Trials, who also managed the database and performed the primary analyses. In collaboration with AstraZeneca, the study results were interpreted by the study steering committee. The corresponding author had full access to the study data and final responsibility for the decision to submit for publication. A full list of the IGNITE study principal investigators and study centres is included in Supplementary Table 1.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jlungcan.2017.08.021.

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