

Provenge

Provenge is a recently approved “vaccine” for the treatment of advanced prostate cancer. Unlike most vaccines which are used to prevent a disease, Provenge does not prevent prostate cancer; it is only used in the treatment of very advanced stages of the disease and, then, only after patients have failed treatment with more traditional forms of treatment.

Currently available only at a limited number of sites nationally, the general public has limited access to obtaining it, as there are limited doses available. The closest sites to Birmingham are Atlanta and Nashville, but these sites are not accepting new patients at this time.

Most Urologists’ and Oncologists’ enthusiasm for Provenge is lukewarm at best. The initial studies suggest that treatment with Provenge can prolong life by about four months but with no real improvement in quality of life or change in PSA or metastatic disease. The vaccine is given three times and the cost is \$95,000. We have no idea what insurance coverage will be, but cannot imagine that it will be fully or even very well covered, even if it was available. This is obviously a tremendous expense for a somewhat limited benefit.

Gene therapy and “vaccinations” are generally thought to be a bright hope in the future treatment of most cancers. Provenge is a start but may not be the turning point and better treatments are certainly still needed and being researched.