



A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

# About Your Chemotherapy



*Caring for Patients within the National Health Service*

## **ABOUT YOUR CHEMOTHERAPY (a guide for patients)**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Thank you for taking time to read this booklet. We recognise this is a frightening and uncertain time for you and your family and hope some of this information will help you through this difficult time.

Remember you are not alone in this and someone on the Ward is always here to talk through any worries you may have.

### ***What is lung cancer?***

Lung cancer is a growth within the lung. It is formed from an abnormal cell which multiplies quickly. As the cancer grows it may cause problems which include:

- breathlessness
- cough
- coughing up blood
- pain

### ***What is Chemotherapy?***

Chemotherapy is a cancer treatment in the form of drugs.

### ***How is chemotherapy given?***

Each patient and their cancer is treated on an individual basis, therefore, not all patients receive the same drugs. Chemotherapy drugs are given either:

- by mouth (as a tablet, capsule or liquid)
- by injection into a vein or by infusion

It is given by a chemotherapy nurse and is no more painful than an injection or blood test.

**IF YOU DO EXPERIENCE PAIN OR DISCOMFORT DURING THE TREATMENT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO INFORM THE NURSE IMMEDIATELY.**

### ***Will I be admitted to hospital for my treatment?***

When you receive your first course of chemotherapy you may need to stay on our ward overnight but subsequent courses can be given as a day case.

### ***How often chemotherapy be given?***

This depends on the type of drugs you are having, although each cycle of chemotherapy will usually be followed by a rest period of 3-4 weeks.

### ***Will I need to attend the ward for a blood test?***

Some patients depending on the prescribed drugs may need to attend the ward 10-14 days after your treatment for a blood test.

All Patients prior to their next course of chemotherapy will need to attend the ward for a blood test and an X-ray. The blood test allows us to check your 'blood count' before your next fall in the number of these cells.

- **Red blood cells** – A reduction in the number of these cells is called anaemia. A mild form of this may result from chemotherapy and usually improves without treatment. Sometimes however a blood transfusion is necessary.
- **White blood cells** – Help to fight infection; when their numbers fall the body's resistance to infection is lowered.
- **Platelets** – are cells needed for clotting the blood; if the number of platelets fall you may notice that your gums bleed when brushing your teeth, nosebleeds can occur and your skin may bruise more easily.

### *Are there any side effects?*

Because some normal cells are affected by chemotherapy, side effects can occur. These may include the following:

- ***Nausea and Vomiting.***  
Because of the drugs available to you to stop nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting, it is rarely a problem now. However, if this is a problem to you it is important to discuss it with your nurse as other anti-sickness treatments are available and change to another may be helpful.  
During the first 24 hours after treatment it is best to avoid heavy meals and try light snacks instead but drink freely. **It is advisable to avoid alcohol at this time.**
- ***Infection***  
Most chemotherapy drugs reduce the body resistance to infection and because of this you will be sent home with a course of antibiotics (starting 1 week after your treatment). However a minor illness can quickly develop into something more serious requiring hospital treatment. Therefore, if you develop a sore throat, cough, shivering, cystitis (pain on passing urine) or a temperature, it is very important to contact the ward or your own GP.
- ***Loss of hair***  
Some drugs can cause thinning of the hair or complete hair loss. This is temporary and your hair will re-grow after the treatment has finished.  
An excellent wig service is available on the NHS and we will arrange this service for you prior to your first course
- ***Sore Mouth***  
The drugs can sometimes cause the lining of the throat and mouth to become sore and/or ulcerated. If this occurs drink plenty of fluids and try to avoid hot liquids or spicy foods. Continue to clean your teeth regularly using a soft brush. Sucking ice may be helpful and it is sometimes necessary to use an antiseptic mouthwash or salt water. However, if this persists it may be a sign of infection and you should contact your GP or the ward.
- ***Constipation and Diarrhea***  
Some drugs can cause temporary diarrhea or constipation. Please let us know if this becomes a problem as medication may help.
- ***Other side effects***
  - tingling or numbness of fingers or toes
  - metallic taste in the mouth
  - tiredness, feeling low in mood

As with the other side effects these are temporary but it is important to inform us as we may be able to help and advise.

***Help and support***

An appointment will be made for you prior to leaving the ward for your next treatment and/or blood test. It is important to keep the appointments if possible. However, if you need to change the appointment please contact the Ward and other arrangements will be made.

As well as the nursing staff and doctors on the Ward, a Macmillan Nurse is also available to discuss any problems **however trivial you may think they are**. We can also arrange for you to talk to other patients who have experienced chemotherapy.

Notes

Please use this space to write down how you have felt at home in between your treatment e.g. sickness, tiredness, etc. You may also use this space to write down any questions that you may want to ask the doctor or nurse at your next appointment.

- After 1<sup>st</sup> Course  
.....
- After 2<sup>nd</sup> Course  
.....
- After 3<sup>rd</sup> Course  
.....
- After 4<sup>th</sup> Course  
.....
- After 5<sup>th</sup> Course  
.....
- After 6<sup>th</sup> Course  
.....

Compiled by Gaynor Wright RGN  
© Designed and printed by United Leeds Hospitals  
NHS Trust Print Unit  
WNN 680