

A GUIDE TO

# Attending for treatment in the Chemotherapy Day Unit

This guide is for patients attending for treatment in the Chemotherapy Day Unit at James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough and the Robert Ogden Cancer Centre at the Friarage Hospital, Northallerton.



**Speciality Oncology  
and Radiotherapy**  
Patient Information

## Introduction

There are many different types of cancer and many different treatments available to treat cancers. For instance some people will be prescribed Chemotherapy, whereas others may be prescribed Immunotherapy drugs or Targeted Cancer Drugs or Hormone therapies.

The type of treatment you receive will be explained in more detail by your Oncologist/Nurse, and further written information about the particular drugs will be given to you.

Some treatments are given over many hours whilst others can be given in less than 1 hour. We encourage patients to bring a relative or friend with them for treatment, however due to limited space available for patients, this is limited to only 1 relative or friend.

## What to bring

Please bring your usual medication, in particular any pain killers you may require over the day. We do not stock medications other than those related to your treatment.

Don't forget to bring reading glasses for your own comfort and perhaps something to read, or some puzzle books, to pass the time. Wear comfortable clothing.

There is free WiFi available in the chemotherapy day units if you wish to use SMART phones or tablets, e-readers or laptops. We ask that you are considerate to those people sitting around you and bring headphones if you wish to listen or watch something on your electronic device.

There is a plentiful supply of tea and coffee and access to drinking water. Soup and sandwiches are available to patients over the lunch time period, but of course if people wish to bring their own food and drinks into the units then this is also acceptable.

## Confidentiality

We will not give out information about you or your illness to anyone except your GP without your permission. Under certain circumstances you have a right to see information about yourself which is held by us, under the terms of the Access to Health Records/Data Protection Act.

For further details please contact the Health Records Manager (telephone 01642 854789).

## Supervision of children

The Trust cannot take responsibility for the care of children when accompanying patients who are attending the department for clinic appointments or treatments. Please make sure that arrangements are made so that children are supervised at all times whilst in the departments.

## Consent to treatment

Your Oncologist will explain the aims of your treatment and any side effects before you agree to, or consent to treatment. You will also be given written information about the Treatment and the drugs themselves and the possible side effects that they may cause.

Please discuss any questions or concerns that you have either with your Oncologist or at your Pre-Assessment or with the Clinic/ Chemotherapy Nurses.

## Pre-assessment clinic

You may be asked to attend a Pre-Assessment Clinic prior to starting your treatment. **You are welcome to bring a family member or friend with you for this appointment.** It will take place in the Chemotherapy Day Unit where you will be having your treatment. You will receive a letter confirming this appointment and may be asked to have blood tests prior to attending. This appointment normally lasts about 1 hour and during this time the nurse will explain your treatment and discuss any potential side effects and for any questions you may have regarding the start of your treatment.

**Please ensure you bring a list of your current medication with you for this appointment.** You will be given a telephone contact card, which explains where to telephone should you have any concerns. You will be given a cancer treatment record booklet and thermometer for use at home following treatment. The nurse will check your blood pressure, pulse and temperature and may take blood samples. You will also have an opportunity to look around the chemotherapy day unit and meet other staff members.

## **Should I take my normal medication before my chemotherapy?**

**Yes. All your regular medication should be taken as normal.** Please ensure you bring any of your medication with you that you may require over the day, as we do not stock medications other than those related to your treatment.

## **What happens when I come for my treatment?**

You will receive an appointment with the Date and time to start your first treatment, this will either be sent to you by post or given to you at your Pre-Assessment Appointment. Your Treatment is given by experienced chemotherapy nurses, who work as part of a team with the doctors and other trained staff. Your Treatment is given intravenously in the Chemotherapy Day Unit (within the Department of Radiotherapy and Oncology) at The James Cook University Hospital or at the Robert Ogden Cancer Centre at the Friarage Hospital, Northallerton.

We use many different types of Chemotherapy, Immunotherapy, Targeted Cancer Drugs and Hormone Therapy in the Chemotherapy Day Unit. Many of these medications are specific to the individual having the treatment and where possible these are made in advance

of you attending for your treatment. However, in some instances, the treatments cannot be made until the day of your treatment and you may have to phone the Chemotherapy Day Unit early on your day of treatment. This is to confirm that you are fit enough to have treatment and to check that your blood tests are within a safe range for your treatment to be given safely. You will be advised at your Pre-Assessment Appointment if you need to call the unit on the day of your treatment.

Some patients require a blood test to be taken on the day of their treatment, this may mean that you may have to wait for those results before starting your treatment. Sometimes blood results may indicate that your blood cells have not recovered enough from your previous treatment, and so your treatment may be delayed for a week or so. Although this is disappointing for patients, we must ensure that we consider your safety and wellness at all times.

## How long will my treatment take?

The duration of a treatment can vary enormously. Some treatments are given in 30 minutes whereas other treatments will take all day to be given this will depend on the medication that you are being given. Treatments are usually given via a Cannula this is inserted into your hand or arm. Some treatments are best given via a Hickman line or a Portacath, which are Central Venous Access Devices (CVAD) these are placed in a large vein. These devices are inserted in



Radiology prior to starting your treatment by a trained Radiographer. Your Oncologist will discuss this with you and if this is required for your treatment to be given. Some medications are given as a slow injection into a vein these are called a Bolus and some are given as a drip over a prescribed time via a machine.

## **Side effects of treatment**

Not everyone receiving treatment will experience side effects and many treatments are well tolerated. However, everyone is different and will have a different reaction to treatments given.

Side effects, should they occur, can be unpleasant, but we now have good medications to control many of them, and we have to balance the possible side effects of the treatment, with the possible benefits we are trying to achieve.

Your Oncologist will discuss potential side effects of the treatment prior to you signing a consent form for treatment. These potential side effects will again be discussed at Pre-Assessment and by a Chemotherapy Nurse prior to commencing treatment.

## **Blood Count**

All the treatments administered can potentially have an impact on your blood results.

Most chemotherapy treatments will reduce the number of white blood cells in the blood, and so you may become more susceptible to picking up an infection. If you do acquire an infection, your body will be less able to fight it and so you may have to attend or be admitted to hospital to be treated with antibiotics. For this reason, it is particularly important that you do not delay seeking medical attention if you think you have an infection.

## Patients should look for:

- High temperature 37.5 C or above (Do not take Paracetamol/ Ibuprofen to reduce your temperature-call the advice line and speak to a trained member of staff)
- Temperature less than 36 C and feeling unwell
- Sweating and/or shivering episodes
- Feeling generally unwell
- Experiencing flu like symptoms

These symptoms could indicate a serious complication, related to chemotherapy, called Neutropenic Sepsis. **If you think you may have an infection, please do not hesitate to contact the hospital straight away - see contact card.**

Some Treatments especially Chemotherapy can affect the red cells in the blood, making you feel tired. If the red cells become too low and you become Anaemic you may require a blood transfusion.

The blood also contains Platelets which help the blood to clot. If the Platelets become too low as a result of your treatment you may bruise more easily or have nose bleeds. If you notice any of these problems please tell Your Oncologist or Nurse.

## Sickness

Most Treatment can cause some Nausea or Vomiting, but not all. For those Treatments that are known to cause Nausea or Vomiting, Anti-Sickness medicines are available and will be given to you before your Treatment starts, you will also be given Anti-Sickness Tablets to take at home after your Treatment for approximately 3 days, maybe longer if needed.

## Mouth

The mouth and tongue can become sore, or ulcers may develop. It is important to keep the mouth clean, so clean your teeth and dentures thoroughly, and use a mouthwash regularly. If you do get a sore mouth it is important to keep drinking plenty of fluids, and to eat a soft diet if possible. Unfortunately some Treatments can often causes a change in taste, with food tasting metallic or bitter.

## Hair Loss

Not all Treatments cause hair loss, but unfortunately some do. You will be advised by your Oncologist/Nurse if your Treatment causes hair loss. With some Treatments it may be possible to try to prevent some hair loss by using a treatment called Cold Caps. This cools the scalp so preventing the Treatment from reaching the hair follicle cells, and in some people the amount of hair loss can be reduced. However, some people cannot tolerate the Cold cap, and in some people it is not effective. If you wish to consider the Cold Cap please ask your Oncologist/Nurse to see if it would be appropriate.

## Bowels

Some of the treatments that are given can affect your bowel habits and may cause Diarrhoea or Constipation. **If you have four or more episodes of Diarrhoea, above your normal bowel habits, it is important to contact the hospital straight away for advice, using the Advice Line Number.** This may then be controlled by medication, it is also very important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration

## Tiredness

Most people do feel more tired after receiving treatment and especially so after Chemotherapy, this can and usually increases as you go through each of your treatments of Chemotherapy. While you are on your treatment try to take things easy and let family and friends help out with shopping, cooking, cleaning etc.

## Infertility

Chemotherapy may cause infertility for both men and women, which may be temporary or permanent. If this is a concern you should discuss this fully with your Oncologist. It may be possible for men to have sperm frozen at a Sperm Bank, this where sperm is collected before treatment is started and stored for future use. For women, Chemotherapy may affect the menstrual cycle, with periods becoming irregular or stopping altogether.

Some patients may find that their interest in sex diminishes while having chemotherapy. There can be many reasons for this and it should return to normal once treatment is completed.

Pregnancy should be avoided during chemotherapy, and reliable contraception is therefore essential.

## Skin Changes

Some treatments can cause redness and irritation to the skin where the drugs were injected into your body. If you notice any changes to this area such as redness, pain, swelling or blistering, then please contact us as soon as possible.

Some of the newer Treatments called Immunotherapies can also cause Rashes to the face and the body it is important if this occurs that you contact the unit via the Advice Line so this can be treated if needed.

## Appetite

Some of the treatments may affect your eating patterns, appetite and taste. If you are eating smaller portions, missing meals and losing weight, try to eat foods that are more nourishing for example use full fat products (yoghurts, milk, puddings) ...

- try creamy soups and adding extra cheese, milk, cream and butter into cooking
- try to eat 'little and often' rather than keeping to traditional meal times. Eat what you fancy, when you fancy
- healthy eating is not a priority at this time.

If you continue to lose weight and your appetite does not improve, you should discuss this with a member of the Nursing Team or your Oncologist and they can refer you to a Dietician who will be able to provide more specific advice and may be if needed have supplements arranged.

## Emotional Needs

Your emotional well-being is as important to us as your physical health. Everyone needs support of some kind during difficult periods. Facing up to Cancer and its Treatments can be one of the most stressful situations you are ever likely to face. During Treatment some people feel stressed, anxious, depressed and, at times, unable to cope. Please let someone know if that is how you are feeling. We can then offer appropriate help and advice, and we may be able to refer you to a specially trained member of the team to help you feel better.

### How Can I Help Myself

- **Keep a positive attitude;** find out as much as you want to know about your disease and its treatment - take an active part in tackling your disease.
- **Have plenty of rest and relaxation;** learning to relax can help some people through difficult times - consider relaxation tapes, meditation, yoga etc.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.**
- **Take some regular exercise** - this will help to relieve tension and is good for your morale.
- **Tell us if you have any problems** - it is better to share them.

## What Happens when my Treatment Ends

The effects of the Treatment will gradually wear off, and you will find that you start to feel back to normal. For most people this will take a few weeks, but for some it may be longer. Please continue to look after yourself during this time. It is important to eating well and rest if you feel tired. If you have any concerns, you have access to the chemotherapy day unit via the telephone contact card for up to six weeks after completion of treatment.

After your Treatment has finished you will also be given an appointment for a follow up with your Oncologist, usually at the hospital where you saw them for your first consultation. This visit will give you the opportunity to discuss any problems or worries that may have arisen and to see how the side effects are settling down. You will continue to be followed up by your Oncologist, but how often you have these visits will depend on your tumour, your Oncologist and who else has been involved in your care. Usually the visits will become less frequent as time goes by.

Your Oncologist will keep in contact with your own Doctor so he or she knows about your progress.

Some people expect to have regular blood tests, x-rays or scans after treatment has ended but this is often not necessary. If you have any questions about this please ask.

### Contact us

Please do not hesitate to contact your Chemotherapy Day Unit for advice.

## Useful contacts

**The Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre**, North Entrance, The James Cook University Hospital (telephone 01642 835674) and **Robert Ogden Cancer Centre**, Friarage Hospital, Northallerton (telephone 01609 764033) offer a drop in centre for benefits advice, cancer information and practical or emotional support to anyone who has cancer, their relatives, friends and carers.

For further information, please speak to a member of your health care team.

**Macmillan help line** (freephone 0808 808 00 00)

Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm.

Also see our website: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

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**Trinity Holistic Centre** (telephone 01642 854839)

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**Hard of hearing?** Use textphone 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay

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**Non English speaker?** Interpreters are available.



## Patient Experience

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust would like your feedback. If you wish to share your experience about your care and treatment or on behalf of a patient, please contact The Patient Experience Department who will advise you on how best to do this.

This service is based at The James Cook University Hospital but also covers the Friarage Hospital In Northallerton, our community hospitals and community health services.

To ensure we meet your communication needs please inform the Patient Experience Department of any special requirements, i.e. Braille/ Large Print.

T: 01642 835964

E: [stees.patient.experience@nhs.net](mailto:stees.patient.experience@nhs.net)

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