PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Haematology/Oncology Unit
(Wards 10 and 11)

INTRODUCTION TO CHEMOTHERAPY

CONTACT NUMBERS:
HAEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY UNIT

DAY CARE UNIT:
Ward 10, 8am - 6pm  Monday - Saturday
01202 704775

INPATIENT UNIT:
Ward 11 - Out of Hours
01202 704772

CHEMOTHERAPY EMERGENCY PHONE LINE:
01202 704302

OUR MISSION
The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust strives to provide high quality care through its professional, efficient and patient-focused approach.

www.rbch.nhs.uk

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Date: 08/02/2011  Version: 1  Review Date: 08/02/2013
Diary
It may be useful if you keep a diary, listing the side effects that you experience after each chemotherapy. The information can help the doctors and nurses care for you and minimise side effects where possible. The nursing staff can provide you with a diary sheet which you can complete on a daily basis.

Preventing Pregnancy
It is vitally important that you use adequate contraception whilst receiving chemotherapy and for at least six months after chemotherapy is completed because of possible harmful effects on a developing foetus. For women of child-bearing age, a pregnancy test will be performed before you commence your course of treatment if you believe it is possible you could be pregnant.

Longer term it is possible that your fertility may be adversely affected by chemotherapy. For women, periods may stop temporarily during treatment and for some women (particularly those close to the menopause) periods may not return normally. For men, sperm may not be produced normally during treatment and following some types of chemotherapy, fertility may be affected longer term. You should discuss this with your doctor prior to starting chemotherapy if you want more information.

Late Effects
Most of the side effects of chemotherapy are short lived and disappear within a few weeks of completing treatment. However some drugs can cause permanent changes to the body. Some chemotherapy may be associated with a small increase in the risk of developing other cancers late in life, however this risk is very low. You should discuss this with your doctor if you want more information.
CHEMOTHERAPY - AN INTRODUCTION

What is chemotherapy?
The word chemotherapy simply means drug treatment. The aim of chemotherapy is to selectively damage and kill cancer cells. There are many different chemotherapy drugs which work in different ways. You may receive one or more drugs as part of your treatment.

Treatment Planning
When planning your treatment, your Doctor will take a number of factors into consideration. The drugs given will depend on the type of cancer you have, where it is in the body and whether or not it has spread to other parts of the body. The amount of the drug you receive is usually based on your height and weight, your age and your general health. Chemotherapy is normally given in cycles, each one separated by a rest period to allow your body to recover from any side effects. The number of cycles you have will depend on the aim of treatment, the way your cancer responds to the treatment and whether or not you suffer from difficult side effects.

How are the drugs given?
Chemotherapy can be given in a number of ways.

Oral (by mouth): You may be given capsules or tablets to take. If you have any trouble swallowing the tablets whole, you should inform your doctor or nurse.

Intravenous injection / intravenous drip: This involves giving the drugs directly into the bloodstream through a small plastic tube called a cannula. The cannula is normally placed temporarily into a vein in the back of your hand or arm which is removed before you go home. Some chemotherapy treatments require a more durable line (called a central line) which is placed in a larger vein in the chest. You will be told about these if you need one. Depending on the drugs used, treatment may be given over a few minutes, hours or over a period of several days. You will be told if your treatment can be given as an outpatient or if you need to be admitted to hospital for it.

What will happen when I contact the hospital?
When you contact the hospital your telephone call will be taken by a nurse. It is possible that you will not know this nurse and therefore he/she will need to ask you some questions to assist in giving you the best advice and treatment. He or she will ask you:

- Your name and date of birth
- The consultant caring for you and the department you normally attend
- The treatment you are or have been receiving
- Details of the worries, concerns or symptoms you have
- Your telephone number and your GP’s name

When the Nurse has all the information he/she needs they will either:

- Give you advice on how to deal with the problem
- Arrange for one of the hospital Doctors or a Specialist Nurse to contact you
- Arrange for you to attend the day case unit or one of the wards in the Cancer Centre
- Arrange for you to be admitted to hospital
- Advise you to contact your GP

Chemotherapy and Everyday Life
The extent to which chemotherapy affects your everyday life is dependent on a number of factors including:

- Your general health
- The particular drugs you are receiving
- The amount of time you need to spend in hospital
- Whether or not you experience side effects and how bad these are
- Your own personal circumstances, such as being a parent to young children, the job you do or having supportive family and friends

Some people find that chemotherapy makes little difference to their lives other than visits to the hospital and may continue to work and take part in their usual social activities. Others feel that chemotherapy makes them feel very tired and lethargic, preventing them from taking part in their normal activities.

It is impossible to predict exactly how you will feel whilst on treatment because everyone reacts differently. However, your nurse or doctor will be able to give you advice on any change in lifestyle that may occur as a result of

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Some drugs are very irritant and can cause damage if they leak out of the veins. It is very important that you inform the nurse if you develop stinging or burning around the cannula whilst the drugs are being given. Please contact the hospital if you develop redness, swelling or pain at the cannula site in the days following your treatment so that appropriate treatment can be given.

Subcutaneous (under the skin) or intra-muscular (into the muscle) injection: Sometimes chemotherapy is given directly as an injection into the arm / thigh.

Intrathecal injection. It is sometimes necessary to give the chemotherapy into the fluid surrounding the spinal cord. This is done by the doctor who inserts a small needle into your back, through which the drug is given. You will have to lie flat for several hours after the procedure to reduce the risk of developing a headache.

Chemotherapy Appointments
Before each cycle of chemotherapy you will need to have a blood test to check if your blood cells have recovered from the previous treatment. The nurse will explain when and where you should have the blood test done.

Chemotherapy drugs are prepared in a special way, are expensive and do not have a long life once made. Therefore you may have to wait while the pharmacy makes up your drugs. Where possible, your chemotherapy will be made in advance so that you are not kept waiting. However this means that if you do not have your treatment, the drugs will be wasted. If you feel unwell or are experiencing side effects, please telephone the hospital before your appointment so we can arrange for you to see a doctor or rearrange treatment for when you are better.

Chemotherapy Side Effects
The side effects that you experience depend very much on the type of chemotherapy drugs that you are given. You will be given specific information about your chemotherapy drugs and the possible side effects. Everyone is an individual and reacts differently to the drugs, and many people experience minimal or no side effects at all.

When should I contact the hospital?
It is important that you tell your doctor or nurse if you develop side effects, so that advice and treatment can be given to relieve them. If things are not improving, don't "grin and bear it" but let us know as there are often other treatments we can try. If you develop any of the following side effects you should contact the hospital on the dedicated oncology helpline number.

- A temperature above 38°C or shivering or feeling hot and cold or any other signs or symptoms of infection

During chemotherapy, your body is unable to fight off infection normally. What may seem like a minor infection could rapidly become extremely serious.

If you feel hot or unwell check your temperature. You should ensure that you purchase a thermometer at the start of your treatment. Normal is between 35 and 37.5 degrees centigrade. If your temperature is 38°C or above you should contact the hospital immediately. If it is between 37.5°C and 38°C then check it again in one hour. If the temperature remains higher than normal then ring the hospital immediately using the dedicated helpline number.

- Persistent nausea and vomiting
- Painful mouth ulcers and/or swelling of the mouth
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Pain or difficulty when passing urine
- Pain, redness or swelling around the injection site
- Diarrhoea (if more than 4 watery stools a day)
- Shortness or breath
- Chest pain

It is important to remember that by getting treatment early you can prevent more serious problems occurring. Often treatment can be given on an outpatient basis, and you will probably not need to stay in hospital if the problem is caught early enough. DO NOT WAIT TO SEE IF YOU GET BETTER ON YOUR OWN - RING AT ANY TIME OF DAY OR NIGHT.

What number should I ring?
You should ring the hospital where you have been receiving treatment:
For The Royal Bournemouth Hospital call 01202 704302