

Information sheet 6: Chemotherapy for brain tumours

Chemotherapy is sometimes used in the treatment of brain tumours. Chemotherapy is treatment with drugs. It may be just one drug or several drugs depending on the type of tumour you have and the intended aims of the treatment.

Treating a brain tumour with chemotherapy is different from a tumour at other sites of the body. The brain is surrounded by a covering called the blood brain barrier. This barrier can stop some drugs from reaching the brain tumour. This limits the number of drugs that can be used.

Temozolomide is a relatively new drug that is being used for brain tumours. It interferes with cell growth, especially in cells that are growing rapidly such as cancer cells, and has been shown to reduce the size of the tumour in some patients. It is usually taken for 6 weeks alongside radiotherapy. This is followed by a 4 week break and then up to 6 further cycles of Temozolomide alone, depending on how well you respond and how the drug affects you.

Often, to increase the effectiveness of the chemotherapy, a combination of drugs is used. One of the most commonly used combinations is **PCV**. This is a combination of three drugs called: **Procarbazine**, **CCNU** and **Vincristine**. **PCV** is usually given every six weeks.

Your doctor may use a slightly different combination and it may be helpful for your doctor or nurse to write down your specific treatment below:

NAME OF DRUGS

FREQUENCY OF TREATMENT

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION

Name

Tel No

Chemotherapy may have side-effects. If you are suffering with any of the symptoms in this leaflet you should contact your own doctor.

The side effects of PCV and temozolomide chemotherapy are outlined in this leaflet. However even if you are having a different combination (or even just one drug) it will give you an idea of what you may be advised to do.

Procarbazine is taken orally and it can occasionally have side effects: nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, flu-like symptoms, a rash or possibly some dizziness. These side effects do not last long because tolerance usually develops over a few days.

In addition you should be aware that you should **avoid** certain foods and drinks, for the time that you are taking the Procarbazine tablets (5-7 days). These include alcohol, cheese, yoghurt, sour cream, chicken livers, banana, avocado and meat

prepared with tenderisers. Eating or drinking any of these may cause an allergic reaction.

Vincristine is given as an injection into a vein, usually into the back of your hand. The side effects associated with this drug can include; hair loss, constipation and over long term use, it can cause tingling of fingers and toes or some muscle weakness.

CCNU is given in tablet form. This may cause nausea and vomiting. Usually an anti-sickness tablet is given to help with these side effects.

Temozolomide is given in tablet form. The most common side effect is nausea and vomiting, but headache, tiredness, loss of appetite, hair loss and constipation can also occur. An anti-sickness tablet is usually given to help relieve the nausea and vomiting.

Many chemotherapy drugs can cause bone marrow suppression. The effects of bone marrow suppression may result in tiredness and lethargy, an increased risk of infection and a susceptibility to bruising and bleeding. **Your blood count will be checked regularly but if you are feeling unwell please see your own doctor. It may make you more susceptible to infection.**

New treatments

There are a number of new chemotherapy drugs that are under research investigation. New treatments are used initially in **clinical trials**. There are studies that are designed to answer specific questions about the drug being used. In this way the effectiveness of the new drug can be assessed.

Your doctor may discuss this with you or you may hear about them from the press or television. Do not hesitate to ask for information and explanation by your doctor.

If there is anything in this leaflet you wish to discuss, please speak to your consultant or your GP, who are best placed to advise you.

You may find it useful to ask medical professionals the following questions about any chemotherapy treatment.

- What is the plan for my treatment and why is it being planned this way?
- How many treatments will I need?
- How often will I have tests once my treatment starts, and what will these tests be?
- How will we know if the treatment's working?
- Will scans show the tumour shrinking?
- How long do the results usually take, and when will I know the results?

Please note that the information we give here is intended to provide simply a basis for discussions with your medical team. If you would like further information or support on brain tumours please contact: **Brain Tumour UK, Tower House, Latimer Park, Chesham, Bucks. HP5 3AP** Helpline: **0845 450 0386** www.braintumouruk.org.uk

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Registered office: Cawley Priory, South Pallant, Chichester, PO19 1SY