

Rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when rituximab should be used to treat people who have follicular lymphoma, and who haven't been treated before, in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with follicular lymphoma but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe follicular lymphoma or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on page 4.



What has NICE said about rituximab?

Rituximab (given with cyclophosphamide, vincristine and prednisolone) is recommended as a possible treatment for people with symptomatic stage III or IV follicular lymphoma who haven't been treated before.

Follicular lymphoma

Lymphoma is cancer of the lymphatic system, which is part of the body's immune defence against infection. Follicular lymphoma is the most common type of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and affects B cells (a kind of white blood cell involved in the immune response). Stage III lymphoma has spread to lymph nodes in both the upper and lower half of the body, and stage IV has spread to other organs in the body.

Rituximab

Rituximab is a type of drug known as a monoclonal antibody. It 'recognises' and sticks to a protein found on the surface of some B cells, both normal and cancerous. This 'labels' the B cells, and they are killed by the body's immune defence system. Once chemotherapy has finished, more normal B cells are produced to replace the ones that were killed.

Rituximab is licensed as a treatment for follicular lymphoma when given with a combination of the chemotherapy drugs cyclophosphamide and vincristine and the steroid prednisolone.

This may not be the only possible treatment for follicular lymphoma. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if you have symptomatic stage III or IV follicular lymphoma, you haven't been treated before, and your doctor thinks that rituximab (given with cyclophosphamide, vincristine and prednisolone) is the right treatment for you, you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you appear to be eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information about follicular lymphoma

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with follicular lymphoma. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Cancerbackup, freephone helpline 0808 800 1234
www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Leukaemia CARE, 24 hour CARE line 0800 169 6680
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Lymphoma Association, freephone helpline 0808 808 5555
www.lymphoma.org.uk, www.lifesite.info
- Macmillan Cancer Support, Macmillan CancerLine 0808 808 2020
www.macmillan.org.uk
- Tenovus: the cancer charity, helpline 0808 808 1010
www.tenovus.com

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may also be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/TA110

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1125).

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

MidCity Place, 71 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6NA; www.nice.org.uk

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