

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Cetuximab for recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck

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

This leaflet is about when **cetuximab** should be used to treat people with recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck 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 recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe recurrent and metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on the back page.



There are several possible treatments for recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. Your healthcare team should talk to you about the treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

Cetuximab in combination with platinum-based chemotherapy is not recommended for people with recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck.

Healthcare professionals should not stop prescribing cetuximab in combination with platinum-based chemotherapy for people who were already taking it when the guidance was issued. These people should be able to carry on taking cetuximab until they and their healthcare professionals decide that it is the right time to stop treatment.

Recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck

The cells that line parts of the body like the mouth and nose are called the 'epithelium'. Squamous cell cancer of the head and neck is cancer of the epithelium of the mouth, nose, throat and surrounding areas. Cancer is described as recurrent when it comes back in a person thought to be cancer free after treatment. When the cancer has spread from the head and neck to other parts of the body, such as the liver, bones or brain, it is called metastatic.

Cetuximab

Cetuximab (also called Erbitux) is a drug that stops cancer cells from multiplying. It is given through a drip into a vein.

What does this mean for me?

NICE looks at how well treatments work and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS.

It was unclear how well cetuximab in combination with platinum-based chemotherapy works compared with existing treatments for recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. There was also evidence that it would not be value for money for the NHS.

This means that for the time being cetuximab in combination with platinum-based chemotherapy should not be prescribed routinely on the NHS. Your doctor should talk to you about other treatment options available to you.

If you are already taking cetuximab with platinum-based chemotherapy for recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck, you should be able to continue taking it until you and your healthcare professional decide it is the right time to stop.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Let's Face It, 01843 833 724
www.lets-face-it.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 2020
www.macmillan.org.uk
- Mouth Cancer Foundation, 01924 950 950
www.mouthcancerfoundation.org
- National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs (NALC), 020 7730 8585
www.laryngectomy.org.uk
- Rarer Cancers Forum, 01227 738279
www.rarercancers.org.uk

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the disease and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, 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/TA172

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N1890). The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.

We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about recurrent and/or metastatic squamous cell cancer of the head and neck.