

**Guidance on  
the use of  
gemcitabine for  
the treatment  
of pancreatic  
cancer –  
Information for  
patients**

May 2001

Further information on NICE, and the full guidance issued to the NHS is available on the NICE web site ([www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)).

The guidance can also be requested from 0870 555 455, quoting reference 23811.

If you have access to the Internet and would like to find out more about cancer visit the NHS Direct website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk).

This leaflet is also available in Welsh, (Ref no. 23814).

**Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg (rhif cyfeirnod 23814).**

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**Further  
Information**

ability to perform certain ordinary tasks: 100 = normal, no complaints, 70 = unable to carry on normal activity, 50 = requires considerable assistance, 40 = disabled, 30 = hospitalisation recommended.

- Gemcitabine should not be used for people with pancreatic cancer who are suitable for surgery that may cure their cancer, or those who have a Karnofsky performance score of less than 50.
- Gemcitabine should not be used as a second line treatment for people with pancreatic cancer, because there is insufficient evidence to support this practice.

If you, or someone you care for, has pancreatic cancer then you can discuss this advice with the doctor or nurse at your next appointment.

Yes. The guidance will be reviewed in April 2004.

What should I do?

Will NICE review its Guidance?

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## What is NICE Guidance?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is a part of the NHS. It produces guidance for both the NHS and patients on medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic tests and clinical & surgical procedures and where they should be used.

When the Institute evaluates these things, it is called an appraisal. Each appraisal takes around 12 months to complete and involves the manufacturers of the drug or device, the professional organisations and the groups who represent patients.

NICE was asked to look at the available evidence on gemcitabine and provide guidance that would help the NHS in England and Wales decide where it should be used in the treatment of pancreatic cancer.

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Cancer is a disease of the body's cells. Normally, all cells divide and reproduce themselves in an orderly and controlled manner. In cancer, the cells multiply without proper control.

Pancreatic cancer is a disease of the pancreas. The pancreas is a large gland found near the stomach. It produces hormones, including insulin, that are secreted into the blood.

Pancreatic cancer affects about 12 people in every 100,000. In 1997 around 5,730 people were diagnosed with this condition, 75 out of 100 of these were over the age of 65. Approximately 12 out of 100 people who are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer survive one year after diagnosis, and about 3 out of 100 survive for 5 years.

People with pancreatic cancer can suffer a range of symptoms. These can include jaundice, feeling sick, diarrhoea, weight loss, loss of appetite and severe pain in their abdomen (tummy). The symptoms of pancreatic cancer can severely reduce a patient's quality of life.

The type of treatment given for a cancer depends on many factors. These include:

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## What is gemcitabine?

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## What has NICE recommended about the use of gemcitabine?

- the type of cancer
- where in the body it started
- what the cancer cells look like under the microscope
- how far they have spread, if at all
- the general health of the patient

Gemcitabine (Gemzar) is a chemotherapy treatment that is toxic to cancer cells. It works by stopping a part of the cancer cell replicating itself. Side effects of gemcitabine are fairly mild, but may include rashes and nausea (feeling sick).

NICE has recommended to the NHS that:

- People with advanced or metastatic (when the cancer has spread to other parts of the body) pancreatic cancer may be treated with gemcitabine as a first line treatment if they have a Karnofsky performance score of 50 or more.

Karnofsky is a measure given by a health professional to a person's

