



Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Managing low-risk basal cell carcinomas in the community

*NICE guidance on
cancer services
recommends how
healthcare services
for people with
cancer should be
organised*

This booklet describes how the treatment of low-risk basal cell carcinoma (or BCC for short) should be organised in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) about which healthcare professionals should be involved in diagnosis and treatment, and where this should take place – this type of guidance is called ‘service guidance’.

This booklet is written for people with low-risk BCC but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition. It does not describe low-risk BCC or the tests or treatments for it in detail. A member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. There are examples of questions you could ask to help you with this on page 6. You can get more information from the organisations listed on page 7.

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The advice in this NICE guidance on cancer services covers:

- the management of low-risk BCCs in the community (at surgeries or clinics outside general hospitals).

This is a partial update of advice on healthcare services for people with skin tumours that NICE produced in 2006. Only the advice on the management of low-risk BCCs in the community has changed.

All the other advice in the 2006 guidance and the accompanying 'Understanding NICE guidance' for people with skin tumours and their families or carers is the same (please see 'More information' on page 7 for details on where to find these).

Basal cell carcinoma

BCC is a type of skin cancer where some cells in the skin grow and divide in an uncontrolled way, leading to an abnormal growth on the skin (sometimes called a tumour or lesion). It usually develops on parts of the body that have been exposed to the sun.

BCC usually presents a low risk to a person's health. However, if it isn't diagnosed early and treated properly it can result in tumours that damage the affected area (including important body parts such as the nose, eye, ear and lip). Such tumours are very challenging to treat.

Deciding whether your BCC is low risk

Your healthcare professional will assess the risk of your BCC. How easy a BCC is to treat affects whether it is classed as high or low risk. This depends on a number of factors, including:

- the type, size and appearance of the tumour
- your age (if you are a child or young adult)
- the strength of your immune system and whether you have a genetic condition that increases your chance of developing BCC
- the location of the tumour (for example, if it is in an area that would make treatment difficult or greatly affect how the skin would look afterwards)
- whether it is a BCC that has reappeared because it was not completely removed the first time it was treated.

Treatment of low-risk basal cell carcinoma

What choices will I have?

Some treatments may not be suitable for you, depending on your exact circumstances. If you have questions about specific treatments and options covered in this booklet, please talk to a member of your healthcare team.

Your healthcare professionals should explain the range of treatments available for low-risk BCC. They should cover possible benefits and risks related to your condition and personal circumstances.

You have the right to be involved in discussions and make informed decisions about your treatment and care. You should be given relevant information that reflects any religious, ethnic, or cultural needs you have and takes into account whether you have any physical or learning disability, sight or hearing problem, or language difficulties. All treatment and care should be given with your informed consent.

Healthcare professionals should follow the Department of Health's advice on consent (www.dh.gov.uk/consent) and the code of practice for the Mental Capacity Act. Information about the Act and consent issues is available from www.publicguardian.gov.uk. In Wales, healthcare professionals should follow advice on consent from the Welsh Assembly Government (www.wales.nhs.uk/consent). If you are under 16, your parents or carers will need to agree to your treatment, unless it is clear that you fully understand the treatment and can give your own consent.

What does treatment involve?

Once the diagnosis of low-risk BCC has been confirmed, treatment is usually relatively simple and involves the removal or destruction of the cancer. Surgery is often used to treat low-risk BCCs by cutting out the cancerous cells, as well as some surrounding healthy tissue (to ensure that no cancerous cells remain).

Other treatments include ointments, drugs that become active when exposed to light (photodynamic therapy) and techniques that work by 'burning' or 'freezing' the cancer cells. Many BCCs that appear on the trunk (not on the head, neck and limbs) can be treated in this way.

Who will do the surgery if I need it?

Surgery to remove low-risk BCCs can often be performed by a healthcare professional with additional skills in skin cancer who is working in the community (such as in GP surgeries or local community hospitals/treatment centres rather than in a general hospital). This will usually be a GP with a special interest and training in this area. Sometimes skin specialists (dermatologists) or members of their team will offer services to manage low risk BCCs in the community too.

What has NICE said?

The NICE guidance explains which healthcare professionals working in the community (at surgeries or clinics outside general hospitals) should diagnose and treat low-risk BCCs and how this service should be organised. It makes specific recommendations about:

- what information should be used to decide whether a person's BCC is low risk
- how information on a person's BCC should be obtained, recorded and acted on
- maintaining and checking the quality of care people receive
- providing information, advice and support for people with low-risk BCC and their families or carers.

In particular, it describes the training, education, qualifications and accreditation (official recognition and approval) that three different groups of healthcare professionals need to manage low-risk BCCs in the community. They are:

- GPs who only operate on low-risk BCCs that are easy to remove (such as those below the collar bone)
- Specialist GPs who remove an expanded range of low-risk BCCs (including some on the head and neck)
- Specialist doctors and nurses who remove both low- and high-risk BCCs.

The guidance describes which low-risk BCCs can be removed by each of the three groups of healthcare professionals working in the community (and in which groups of patients). It explains when specialist skin cancer teams should be involved in care and treatment. Following a discussion with your healthcare professional, you should be referred to (offered an appointment with) a member of a specialist skin cancer team if:

- you are below the age of 25
- you have a weakened immune system or an inherited condition called Gorlin's syndrome
- there is any doubt about the risk your tumour presents
- your healthcare professional does not have the necessary skills and knowledge to treat your low-risk BCC in the community.

Why has NICE said this?

- NICE has made these recommendations to make sure that healthcare professionals have the knowledge and skills needed for the risk level of each BCC they diagnose and treat.

What does this mean for me?

- You should only have your low-risk BCC diagnosed and removed by a healthcare professional in the community if they have the knowledge and skills to provide this service and have been accredited to do so. You should ask your healthcare professional to discuss treatment choices with you.

Questions you might like to ask your healthcare team

- Please explain the difference between high- and low-risk BCC.
- Would it help my condition if I protected my skin from the sun?
- Please give me more details about the tests/investigations I should have. How long will it take to get the results?
- What are the treatment options?
- Please tell me why you have decided to offer me this particular type of treatment.
- Please tell me what the treatment will involve. Where will I have the treatment?
- What will my skin look like after treatment?
- Is the healthcare professional who is going to remove or treat my low-risk BCC trained and accredited to do so?
- What will happen if I choose not to have the treatment?
- Will I need any further treatment or care?
- Are there any support organisations in my local area?
- Can you provide any information for my family/carers?

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with low-risk BCC. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- CancerHelp UK – the patient information website of Cancer Research UK, 0808 800 4040
www.cancerhelp.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk
- Skin Care Campaign, 020 8378 1497
www.skincarecampaign.org

The South West Public Health Observatory Skin Cancer Hub website (www.swpho.nhs.uk/skincancerhub) has information you may find useful. NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) may also 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.

The 2006 NICE guidance 'Improving outcomes for people with skin tumours including melanoma' and the accompanying 'Understanding NICE guidance' for people with skin tumours and their families or carers are available at www.nice.org.uk/CSGSTIM

If you have talked to your healthcare team, and you think that a treatment is suitable for you but it is not available, you can contact your local patient advice and liaison service ('PALS') or NHS Direct Wales.

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 condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. 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 booklet and a version of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals and service organisers are available at www.nice.org.uk/CSGSTIM

The version for healthcare professionals and service organisers contains more detailed information on the care and treatment you should be offered and how it should be organised.

You can order printed copies of this booklet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N2193). 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 booklet in their own information about low-risk BCC.