

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Pemetrexed for malignant pleural mesothelioma

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

This leaflet is about when **pemetrexed** should be used to treat people with malignant pleural mesothelioma in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It does not cover the use of pemetrexed for any other type of cancer. It is written for people with malignant pleural mesothelioma but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

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



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

What has NICE said?

Pemetrexed is recommended as a possible treatment for malignant pleural mesothelioma in people:

- with advanced disease
- whose cancer is not suitable for surgical resection (removal) and
- who have a World Health Organization (WHO) performance status of 0 (able to carry out all normal activity without restriction) or 1 (restricted in strenuous activity but able to move around and carry out light work).

Healthcare professionals should not stop prescribing pemetrexed for people who were already taking it when the guidance was issued. These patients should be able to carry on taking pemetrexed until they and their specialist decide that it is the right time to stop treatment.

Malignant pleural mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that occurs in mesothelial cells. These cells form a covering, called the mesothelium, over the surfaces of many organs in the body. Mesothelioma usually develops in the tissues (called the pleura) covering the lungs. This is known as pleural mesothelioma.

Cancer is described as being malignant if it is capable of spreading to surrounding tissues or other parts of the body.

Symptoms of malignant pleural mesothelioma include shortness of breath, chest pain and fluid on the lungs. People may also experience tiredness, weight loss, sweating and difficulty swallowing.

Pemetrexed

Pemetrexed (also known as Alimta) is an anticancer drug. It works by interfering with an enzyme that cancer cells need to survive and multiply, so pemetrexed stops the cancer from getting bigger and kills some cancer cells.

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 advanced malignant pleural mesothelioma which is not suitable for surgical resection (removal), a WHO performance status of 0 or 1, and your specialist thinks that pemetrexed 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.

If you are already taking pemetrexed for malignant pleural mesothelioma, you should be able to continue taking it until you and your specialist decide it is the right time to stop.

More information

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

- Cancerbackup, 0808 800 1234
www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Tenovus: the cancer charity, 0808 808 1010
www.tenovus.com
- Occupational and Environmental Diseases Association (OEDA),
020 8360 6413
www.oeda.demon.co.uk
- June Hancock Mesothelioma Research Fund, 0114 274 4420
www.junehancockfund.org
- Ridings Asbestos Support and Awareness Group (RASAG),
0113 231 1010
www.asbestos-action.org.uk

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may 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 guidance (advice) 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/TA135

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1455).