

PRESS RELEASE

NICE issues guidance on the use of cetuximab for the treatment of head and neck cancer

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (25 June 2008) published guidance on the use of cetuximab for the treatment of head and neck cancer.

Cetuximab in combination with radiotherapy is recommended as a possible treatment for people with locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck if:

- they have a Karnofsky performance-status score of 90% or more, and
- all forms of platinum-based chemotherapy are considered inappropriate.

Healthcare professionals should not stop prescribing cetuximab in combination with radiotherapy for people who were already receiving it when the guidance was issued, but who do not fulfil the above criteria. These patients should be able to carry on taking cetuximab until they and their healthcare professionals decide that it is the right time to stop treatment.

When assessing Karnofsky performance-status score, healthcare professionals should take into account any disabilities that might affect a person's ability to carry out daily activities.

Professor Peter Littlejohns, NICE Clinical and Public Health Director and Executive Lead for this guidance said: "Squamous cell cancer of the head and neck is cancer of the lining of the mouth, nose, throat and surrounding areas. Our independent advisory committee has recommended cetuximab for a specific sub-group of patients for whom this treatment is both clinically and cost effective."

Ends

Notes for editors

About this appraisal

1. Karnofsky performance status is a measure of someone's ability to carry out daily activities. A person with a score of 100% would have no signs of disease and would be able to carry out everyday tasks normally. Someone with a score of 90% would show some signs of disease, but they would still be able to carry out everyday tasks as normal.

About NICE

2. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
3. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.