

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Bortezomib and thalidomide as first treatments for multiple myeloma

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

This leaflet is about when **bortezomib** and **thalidomide** should be used to treat people with multiple myeloma 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 multiple myeloma but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe multiple myeloma 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 page 4.



These may not be the only possible treatments for multiple myeloma. A member of your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

NICE recommends bortezomib and thalidomide as possible first treatments for some people with multiple myeloma (see below).

Who can have bortezomib and thalidomide?

You should be able to have thalidomide if:

- it's given with a type of drug called an alkylating agent (for example, melphalan) and a type of drug called a corticosteroid (for example, prednisolone) **and**
- intensive drug treatment together with a stem cell transplant is not suitable for you.

You should be able to have bortezomib if:

- you would normally be offered thalidomide but you cannot take it because of side effects or other reasons.

Why has NICE said this?

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

NICE recommended thalidomide because it works better than other treatments available on the NHS (such as melphalan with prednisolone). Although its use costs more than these other treatments, this was justified by the benefits it provided.

NICE recommended that bortezomib should only be offered to people who cannot take thalidomide. This is because although bortezomib works as well as thalidomide it costs more.

Multiple myeloma

Multiple myeloma is a type of cancer that develops from cells called plasma cells, which are found in the bone marrow. It is described as 'multiple' because it can occur in several places in the body. Symptoms can include bone pain, bone fractures, anaemia, loss of appetite, excessive bleeding after cuts or scrapes, and frequent infections.

Although there is no cure for multiple myeloma at present, treatments are available that can slow down the progress of the condition, control the symptoms and improve a person's quality of life.

Bortezomib and thalidomide

Bortezomib (also known as Velcade) is an anticancer drug that belongs to a group of drugs known as proteasome inhibitors. These drugs stop cancer cells from growing and cause them to die. Thalidomide (also known as Thalidomide Celgene) is a drug with several actions. One of these is stopping the growth and causing the death of cancer cells.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have multiple myeloma, and you and your specialist think that bortezomib or thalidomide is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' on page 2), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see

www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with multiple myeloma. 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
- Leukaemia CARE, 0808 8010 444
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research, 020 7269 9060
www.beatbloodcancers.org
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk
- Myeloma UK, 0800 980 3332
www.myeloma.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, nurses and other healthcare professionals, 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/guidance/TA228

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N2615). 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 multiple myeloma.