

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Gemcitabine for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer

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

This leaflet is about when **gemcitabine** should be used to treat people with metastatic breast cancer 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 gemcitabine to treat other types of cancer. It is written for people with metastatic breast cancer but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe metastatic breast cancer or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team 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 metastatic breast cancer. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

Gemcitabine, which is combined with another medicine called paclitaxel to treat metastatic breast cancer, is only recommended as a possible treatment for people with metastatic breast cancer in situations where two other treatments could also be used as alternatives.

Other treatments that doctors could use in the same situation are a medicine called docetaxel (given on its own) and docetaxel combined with another medicine called capecitabine.

Metastatic breast cancer

Metastatic breast cancer can also be called secondary breast cancer. It is advanced breast cancer that has spread through the bloodstream or lymph system to other parts of the body such as the bones, liver or brain.

Gemcitabine

Gemcitabine is a drug used in chemotherapy for people with metastatic breast cancer. It can be used to treat metastatic breast cancer when it is combined with another chemotherapy drug called paclitaxel, and after other chemotherapy medicines called anthracyclines have either not worked or were considered unsuitable.

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 metastatic breast cancer, and your doctor thinks that gemcitabine combined with paclitaxel 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.

More information about metastatic breast cancer

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

- Breakthrough Breast Cancer, information line 08080 100 200
www.breakthrough.org.uk
- Breast Cancer Care, helpline 0808 800 6000
www.breastcancercare.org.uk
- Cancerbackup, helpline 0808 800 1234
www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, CancerLine 0808 808 2020
www.macmillan.org.uk
- Tenovus: the cancer charity, helpline 0808 808 1010
www.tenovus.com

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 advice (guidance) 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/TA116

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1179).