

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Rituximab for the treatment of relapsed or refractory stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

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

This leaflet is about when **rituximab** should be used to treat people with stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma 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 stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma 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 stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Your specialist should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

Rituximab is recommended for people with relapsed stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma if it is used:

- in combination with chemotherapy treatment
- by itself to help maintain control of the disease in people who have already had chemotherapy and are in remission.

Rituximab by itself is also recommended as a possible treatment for people who have relapsed or refractory stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma after all possible chemotherapy treatments have been tried but no longer work or cannot be taken because severe side effects have occurred or are expected.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

Lymphoma is cancer of the lymph nodes and lymphatic system, which form part of the body's immune defence against infection. There are two types of lymphoma - Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Follicular lymphoma is a type of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma that affects B cells (a type of white blood cell). Lymphoma is described as stage III if it affects the lymph nodes above and below the sheet of muscle underneath the lungs (called the diaphragm). It is described as stage IV if the lymphoma is more widespread and affects organs such as the liver, bones or lungs as well as the lymph nodes.

Lymphoma is described as 'refractory' if it does not respond or stops responding to treatment. Lymphoma is described as 'relapsed' if it comes back after the person has been in remission. Lymphoma is described as being in 'remission' when symptoms improve and the disease is under control.

Rituximab

Rituximab (also known as MabThera) is a type of drug known as a monoclonal antibody. It 'recognises' and sticks to the B cells which are then killed by the body's immune system. Rituximab sticks to normal and cancerous B cells and the immune system kills both types. However, once treatment has finished, the body starts to replace its normal 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 stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and your specialist thinks that rituximab 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

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. 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
- Leukaemia CARE, 0800 169 6680 and 0808 801 0444
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Lymphoma Association, 0808 808 5555
www.lymphoma.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/TA137

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N1476).

We encourage NHS and voluntary sector organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.