

PRESS RELEASE

NICE issues final guidance on the use of rituximab for first line chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (22 July) published guidance on the use of rituximab for the first line treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. The guidance recommends that rituximab should be considered as a possible first treatment for people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia who are able to take fludarabine in combination with cyclophosphamide.

Rituximab should only be used in combination with fludarabine and cyclophosphamide. Rituximab is not recommended in combination with any other chemotherapy agents as a first treatment for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is the most common form of adult leukaemia and is a cancer of the white blood cells (lymphocytes). The cancerous lymphocytes multiply in an uncontrolled way and stop normal white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets (blood fragments that have a role in the clotting of blood) from working properly.

Dr Carole Longson, NICE Health Technology Evaluation Centre Director said:

“After looking at all of the available evidence the independent Appraisal Committee concluded that rituximab, when used as a first line treatment for people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia who are able to take fludarabine in combination with cyclophosphamide, represented an effective use of NHS resources. This important guidance increases the treatment options available to people with this condition, wherever they live in England and Wales.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the appraisal

1. The guidance is available at: www.nice.org.uk/TA174
2. Rituximab (also known as MabThera) is a type of drug known as a monoclonal antibody. It 'recognises' and sticks to one type of lymphocyte known as B cells. These 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.

About NICE

3. 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.
4. 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.