

Rituximab for first-line treatment of stage III–IV follicular 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, in the NHS in England and Wales, **rituximab** should be used to treat people with stage III–IV follicular lymphoma who haven't been treated before. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with follicular lymphoma but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe follicular lymphoma 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.

This may not be the only possible treatment for follicular lymphoma. 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 rituximab in combination with certain chemotherapies as a possible treatment for people with stage III–IV follicular lymphoma who haven't been treated before (first-line treatment). Your doctor should talk to you about which chemotherapies can be used in combination with rituximab.

Who can have rituximab?

You should be able to have rituximab if all of the following apply:

- you have symptoms
- you have not had treatment before.

NICE has produced separate guidance on when rituximab can be offered to people with stage III–IV follicular lymphoma who have been treated before.

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 rituximab in combination with certain chemotherapies because it works better than other treatments available on the NHS. Although it costs more than some other treatments, this was justified by the additional benefits it provided.

Follicular 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 a type of white blood cell known as B cells.

Stage III lymphoma has spread to lymph nodes in both the upper and lower half of the body, and stage IV has spread to other organs in the body.

Rituximab

Rituximab is a type of drug known as a monoclonal antibody. It ‘recognises’ and sticks to 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 make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have stage III–IV follicular lymphoma, and you and your doctor think that rituximab in combination with chemotherapy 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 follicular lymphoma. 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, <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>
- Lymphoma Association, 0808 808 5555, www.lymphomas.org.uk
- Leukaemia CARE, 0808 8 010 444, www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 0000, www.macmillan.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 document and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA243

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 follicular lymphoma.

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ISBN 978-1-84936-766-0

Jan 12

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