Cancer of the Cervix
Information Leaflet

This leaflet has been written to help you understand about cancer of the Cervix (Cervical Cancer), its diagnosis, treatment and support available. You may wish to discuss some aspects with your doctor or Clinical Nurse Specialist.

What is Cancer?

The organs of the body are made up of cells. Cancer is a disease of these cells. The cells normally divide in an orderly manner. Sometimes the cells divide out of control - developing into a lump/tumour. A tumour which is malignant consists of cancer cells which have the ability to spread beyond the original site, destroying surrounding tissue. Sometimes they can break away and spread to other parts of the body.

The Cervix

The cervix is the lower part of the uterus, often called the neck of the womb. Most of the cervix is visible from the vagina. It is from a small opening in the centre of the cervix (cervical os) that smears are taken.

Situated close to the cervix is a collection of small glands called lymph nodes. The lymph nodes make up part of the lymphatic system, which is one of the body’s defence systems.

How Does Cancer Of The Cervix Develop?

In almost all cases, cervical cancer is the result of a change in the cell DNA caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Some types of HPV don’t cause any symptoms and some are linked to increased risk of cervical cancer and can take many years to develop. There are two main types of cervical cancer, one (squamous) forms on the outside of the cervix and this is the one detected by the smear test, the other (adenos) is found deeper in the cervix and is more difficult to detect.

Approximately 3224 women each year are diagnosed as having cervical cancer, in England and Wales (O.N.S. 2014). More than 99% of cases occur in women who have been infected with HPV. Other risk factors can affect a woman’s chance of developing cervical cancer. These include: smoking, weakened immune system, taking the OCP. (Jo’s Trust, 2017)
What Are The Signs And Symptoms?

- Bleeding between periods or after intercourse
- Bleeding any time after your menopause
- Increased or unusual vaginal discharge, which may be offensive
- Back pain
- Blood in your urine
- Pain when passing urine
- Rectal bleeding
- Swelling of the legs
- Discomfort or pain during sexual intercourse
- Increased frequency passing urine

These symptoms may also be due to other conditions. You should seek a medical opinion. (RCN, 2014).

Diagnosing Cancer of the Cervix

A full medical history will be undertaken and a number of other tests may be carried out before a definite diagnosis can be made. This may include:

- Cervical screening test
- Vaginal examination
- Colposcopy (looking at the cervix with a small microscope)
- Biopsy, (a small piece of tissue taken from the cervix for further examination under a microscope)
- Examination under anaesthetic (eua), to examine the cervix, uterus, rectum and bladder while you are asleep
- MRI scan. (see Clatterbridge Cancer Centre (CCC) leaflet).

Other investigations may be added to these to allow the doctor to determine the site and stage of the cancer, in order to plan your treatment.

Stages of Cancer

Staging is a process of investigations which may be used to determine type/size of the tumour and if there is any spread. Staging is important to help decide treatment options.

Stages of Cancer of the Cervix

The following stages are used for cancer of the cervix.

**Stage 1** - Cancer found only in the cervix

**Stage 2** - Cancer extends beyond the cervix into the upper part of the vagina

**Stage 3** - Cancer extends to the pelvic wall and lower third of the vagina

**Stage 4** - Cancer extends beyond the pelvis into other organs, i.e. bladder, rectum

**Recurrent Disease** – means the cancer has come back (recurred) after it has been treated.
Treatment Options

There are four main treatment options for cancer of the cervix, it may be that one or a combination of treatments will be recommended to you.

- Surgery
- Radiotherapy
- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy combined

The type of treatment that is best for you will be decided by your consultant in discussion with yourself.

Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are research studies involving patients which compare a different type of medical care with the best treatment currently available. You may be approached regarding a clinical trial which your consultant or specialist nurse will be able to discuss with you. Macmillan Cancer Support, produce a booklet which may be helpful to you.

Surgery

Surgical treatment involves the removal of the cervix, uterus, tubes and lymphnodes (Radical Hysterectomy). On occasion the ovaries will also be removed. This can either be performed laparoscopically or a midline incision,(see radical hysterectomy leaflets)
A Radical Trachelectomy is an operation removing the cervix - which may help preserve fertility. Lymph – nodes may also be removed at the same time or at a later date. This is a possible option for early stage disease. (See leaflet Trachelectomy’).

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy treatment is given from the outside from a machine called a linear accelerator. Treatment can also be internal. This is given by placing a tube containing a radiotherapy treatment source in the Vagina (under sedation or anesthetics) for a period of time, similar to a large tampon.

The type of radiotherapy and length of time will be planned and decided individually between the doctor and yourself. (see CCC radiotherapy booklet for more information).

Following radiotherapy you may suffer from vaginal dryness and narrowing. Scar tissue may slowly develop in the vagina resulting in either narrowing or shortening of the vagina. Your doctor, nurse or therapy radiographer may advise you to use a vaginal dilator and will discuss this with you. In some cases Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy together may be a treatment option.

Chemotherapy

Depending on the type and stage of your cancer, your doctor may suggest chemotherapy or chemotherapy and radiotherapy combined. (see CCC booklet & specific information sheets).
Life and Relationships

- Most people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have cancer.
- Many different emotions arise which can cause confusion.
- Reactions differ from one person to another.
- There is no right or wrong way to feel.
- You may experience the whole range of personal emotions and reactions both similar or different from family and friends.
- Support and guidance is available in coping with these feelings.
- Many people find great comfort in their faith and/or religious and spiritual beliefs.

Following the diagnosis of cancer and your subsequent treatment, you may experience physical changes. There may be some issues/concerns you wish to raise/explore, i.e.

- Body Image
- Weight Gain/loss
- Sexual Health
- Menopause Symptoms
- Fertility Issues
- Others

Your Clinical Nurse Specialist will be able to support you by explaining about the issue/concern and provide advice and information if required. This may help you adjust/cope with these changes. This may include involvement of other members of the Health Care Team (HCT) i.e.

- Dietician
- Lymphoedema Practitioner
- Occupational Therapist via your GP
- Physiotherapist
- Primary Health Care Team (PHCT)
- General Practitioner (GP), District Nurse (DN), Community Macmillan Nurse (CM)

You may not be aware of who can help with changes in social and financial matters, but your Clinical Nurse Specialist can put you in touch with the relevant people who can provide guidance and advice in these and other aspects, including childcare, how to tell the children and practical day to day issues. ie. Macmillan/Welfare Benefits advice.

You may wish to explore information and coping methods to help yourself. Therefore, the following booklets may be helpful, (there are many others) from Macmillan Cancer Support.

- Adjusting to life after cancer
- Close relationships & cancer
- Life with cancer
- Sexuality & Cancer
- Body image and sexuality

Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies may be helpful to you and your family. There are many different types i.e.

- Reflexology
- Massage
- Relaxation

Plus many others. Your support nurse can advise you by providing information regarding the appropriateness for you and how to access them.
Your Follow up Care

This will be tailored to your specific needs. Your Clinical Nurse Specialist will also be able to offer you and your family advice, information and support, regarding your cancer, subsequent treatment and associated health issues.

Equal Opportunities

The hospital is committed to promoting an environment which provides equal opportunities for all patients, visitors and staff. If you have special requirements such as dietary needs, interpreter services, disability needs or a preference for a female doctor, please do not hesitate to discuss this with a member of staff who will try to help you.

Support Networks Available Locally

Further information, advice and support is available for you/partner family from:

Knowsley
Lyndale Cancer Support Centre
Tel: 0151 489 3538

Sefton Cancer Support Group
Tel: 01704 879352
www.seftoncancersupport.org.uk

St Helens Cancer Support Group
Tel: 01744 21831

Warrington & District Cancer Self-Help Group
Tel: 01925 453139

The Wirral Holistic Care Services
Tel: 0151 652 9313
www.wirralholistic.org.uk

Widnes & Runcorn Cancer Support Group Tel: 0151 423 5730

Isle of Man
Manx Cancer Help Association
Tel: 01624 679554
www.manxcancerhelp.org

Liverpool Sunflowers
Liverpool Cancer Support
Tel: 0151 726 8934

National Resource Organisations for Gynae Oncology Patients

Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment London SE1 7UQ
Cancerline: 0808 8080000
Mon-Fri 9am-8pm
www.macmillan.org.uk
The Daisy Chain Network
For additional information send an SAE to: The Daisy Chain Network, PO Box 183, Rossendale, Lancashire, BB4 6WZ
Email: membership@media@daisynetwork.org.uk  www.daisynetwork.org.uk

The Daisy network is a premature menopause support group which offers advice, information and support for women throughout the UK.

Menopause Matters
www.menopausematters.co.uk

For accurate up to date information about the menopause and its treatment options “An easy to use, independent, clinician-led website”.

Gynae C
1 Bollingbroke Road, Swindon 5N2 2L8
Tel: 01793 491116
Email: GynaeC@yahoo.com
www.communicate.co.uk/wilts.gynaec

A support group/helpline run by Helen Jackson for women (and their family or friends) who have any gynaecological cancer.

Jo’s Trust
www.jotrust.co.uk

Established in June 1999 Jo’s Trust is a registered charity dedicated to women and their families and friends affected by pre-cancer and cancer of the cervix. The trust’s principal activity is the provision of good information, confidential medical advice and support about every aspect of this illness through its website.

Ask your support nurse for a free copy of The Cancer Guide which can guide, support and inform you through your cancer experience.

References


Royal College of Nursing (2014) Gynaecological Cancer
Publication code 002 S18

Macmillan (2014) Understanding Cancer of the Cervix

www.nhs.uk (2017) cervical cancer

Jo’s Trust.org.uk (2017) Symptoms of cervical cancer
This leaflet can be made available in difference formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk.