

Patient Information - Conventional Photodynamic Therapy

Department of Dermatology

Introduction

This leaflet is intended to provide you with information regarding your conventional photodynamic therapy. It is to help answer questions you or your family may have following your initial consultation and referral for treatment from a dermatology doctor or specialist nurse.

What is conventional photodynamic therapy?

Photodynamic therapy is a method of treating localised skin cancers or certain types of pre-cancerous lesions. The treatment consists of applying a special cream to the affected area for 3 hours and then after this time, shining a pure red light on it. Both the light and the cream are harmless on their own and will not affect normal skin. Only when the two are combined will they treat abnormal areas of your skin. The treatment is usually repeated again after one week.

The doctor or nurse will explain some of the aims, benefits, risks and alternative procedures. We want you to be informed about your choices to help you to be fully involved in making any decisions. Please ask about anything you do not fully understand or wish to have explained in more detail.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

- Healing to the wound site is usually rapid with minimal damage to surrounding healthy cells
- Photodynamic treatments can be repeated if necessary with no reduction in its efficiency.
- The cosmetic result is usually very good.
- Having this treatment does not prevent you from receiving any of the other treatment options in the future.

Are there risks from having this treatment?

There are no long-term side effects from photodynamic therapy, but there are a few minor drawbacks:

- You may experience discomfort during and after the treatment.
- A persistent area of discolouration (usually light brown) is occasionally left at the treatment site.

- There is a risk the lesion may reoccur following photodynamic therapy.

Where and when is the treatment performed?

- The procedure is performed at Hertford County Hospital - Clinic D.
- Treatment times are 8am and 1pm on Wednesdays.
- The procedure is performed by dermatology nurses.
- The treatment is usually given on two separate occasions.

Application of the cream

Please inform the nurse prior to treatment if you have a peanut or soya allergy.

- We will remove any crusting overlying the area to allow the cream to penetrate into the skin.
- We will then apply the special photosensitising cream to the lesion and surrounding area and place a dressing over the top. It is essential that you do not disturb or press on this dressing so that the cream is not displaced.
- We will give you a time to return to the clinic for treatment. The cream must be left in place for a minimum of 3 hours. The cream may be left longer than three hours with no ill effects. During this time, you may stay at the hospital or leave the hospital and return later for your appointment. If you leave the hospital, make sure you protect the area from very cold air or direct sunlight. You may eat and drink as normal.

Illumination with a red light (3 hours after the cream has been applied)

- When you return for the treatment we will remove the dressing and any excess cream. An ultraviolet light is then shone onto the area to determine whether the cream has been absorbed.
- You will then be asked to sit or lie down, whichever is more comfortable, as it is important that you do not move during the treatment.
- We will shine a red light onto the affected area. You will be asked to wear goggles to protect your eyes from the red light.
- The exposure to red light treatment lasts for approximately 8 minutes. You might experience a tingling or burning feeling during the treatment. Please let us know as we can use a number of methods to help relieve this discomfort, such as a cooling water spray etc. You might also find it helpful to bring your usual pain relief tablets, i.e. paracetamol, with you.
- After treatment has completed you will have a dressing placed over the treatment site.

What should I do when I return home?

- Keep the dressing that has been applied to the treated area in place for 48 hours. This is to protect the skin site and to avoid daylight getting to the treated area. After this time the dressing can be removed.
- Any discomfort usually settles within the first few hours. Occasionally it will last for up to 24 hours. Taking paracetamol or Ibuprofen should help.

- After the first 48 hours, you can wash, bathe or shower as usual. Do not rub the treated area but gently dab it dry with a clean towel. Swimming should be avoided until the area is fully healed. If the area is on the scalp, cover with a hat or if on the body, cover with clothing for approximately 6 weeks to reduce the risk of colour changes.
- After the dressing has been removed, the treated area will probably crust/scab over. Healing takes place under this crust. It is important that you do not disturb or pick at it because the crust will fall off naturally when the area underneath has healed, usually after a few weeks.
- In some cases, the treated area will appear pink, swollen or it may ooze a little. This is normal and signifies a stronger treatment reaction. This will usually settle down in a couple of days.
- The treatment is usually given on two occasions a week apart. The nurse will let you know when to return for the next treatment if applicable.

Follow-up appointment

A follow-up appointment to see a Dermatologist is usually made for three months' time.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your treatment, please call the phototherapy unit at Hertford County Hospital, on the telephone number shown below.

The unit is open Monday to Friday, 7.30am to 5pm (excluding Bank Holidays).

If you experience a reaction to treatment outside of these hours, then please call **NHS 111** for advice.

Contact details

Dermatology Department
Hertford County Hospital
North Road
Hertford
Hertfordshire SG14 1LP

Telephone: Dermatology secretary	☎ 01992 823012
Dermatology nurse helpline	☎ 01992 823038
Outpatient appointments	☎ 01438 284444

Date of publication: July 2018
Author: Dermatology Team
Reference Number: JW12 (2) V2 (Oct 2018)
Review Date: July 2021
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