Ambulatory care in clinical haematology

Information for patients
Haematology
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What does ambulatory care mean?

**Ambulatory care** refers to treatments traditionally delivered as an inpatient which can now be offered to you as an outpatient and may also be termed as day care. The Haematology Day Case Unit would like to provide such a service for selected treatments.

A number of treatments have in the past required a sometimes lengthy hospital stay; these can now be offered on an outpatient basis from our Haematology Day Case Unit.

At our expense, you and your carer may stay in hospital accommodation within close proximity to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital and visit the Haematology Day Case Unit daily, or every other day according to your treatment schedule.

Alternatively, if you live very near to the hospital (for example if it takes you no more than 30 minutes by car in busy traffic to get to the hospital), it may be possible for you to stay at home and travel to the Haematology Day Case Unit for medical and nursing care every day or every other day as your treatment schedule requires.
What are the benefits of having my treatment as ambulatory care?

The service offers you, the patient, a number of benefits:

- You will still have 24 hours a day, 7 days a week access to expert medical and nursing care even though you are not staying in a hospital ward.
- You can have the company of a friend/relative 24 hours a day throughout your treatment - which is not always possible in hospital.
- You will receive the same treatment as you would on the ward except that it is scheduled to take place between the hours of 9.00am and 8.00pm.
- These treatment times mean that you can continue daily life away from the hospital and spend time with friends and family.
- In our experience, patients who have had ambulatory care have described enjoying a greater sense of normality and independence than if the treatment meant staying in hospital for the whole time.

‘We had the freedom to lead as normal a life as possible under the circumstances.’

‘I felt like I wasn't taking up a hospital bed when I still felt well.’

‘We enjoyed the peace and quiet, and the chance to eat when we liked.’

How will I know whether ambulatory care is suitable for me?

It cannot be stressed enough that your safety and the quality of care throughout your treatment is of paramount importance to us. It is very important to find out whether this type of care is suitable for you: this will be discussed with you by your Royal Hallamshire Hospital Haematology Consultant and Specialist Nursing Team.
Below is listed a number of requirements that we think are important for you to understand before agreeing to ambulatory care.

- For some treatments you may require a carer to stay with you at all times outside of your hospital visits. Please speak to your specialist nurse for further advice.
- You and your carer must be willing to sign a consent form.
- You and your carer(s) must be fluent in written and spoken English.
- You agree to attending a morning appointment in the Haematology Day Case Unit for assessment and appropriate treatments that may take several hours. This may be every day or every other day depending on your treatment schedule.
- You agree to stay in the hospital flat provided for you and your carer if your Consultant decides that you live too far from the hospital.
- You agree to take your own medication at the times stated.
- You and your carer are capable of taking your temperature and contacting the Haematology Day Case Unit during office hours (8.00am-8.00pm Mon-Fri and 8.00am-4.00pm on Saturdays) or ward P3 on Sunday and bank holidays, if your temperature goes above 37.5°C.
- You or your carer will contact the Haematology Team if you feel unwell. You will be given specific instructions of who to call and when to call (see section ‘What if I become unwell during my stay in ambulatory care?’).
- You and/or your carer must be able to record your fluid intake each day, and report this to your designated nurse on the Haematology Day Case Unit or ward P3.
- You know how to look after your Hickman line to keep it clean and free from infection.
- You understand the importance of following the advice you are given and the complications that can occur with your treatment.
You agree to be admitted to ward P3 or an appropriate inpatient ward when advised by the Haematology doctor.

You are contactable by phone 24 hours a day (either land line or mobile).

You are aware that you or your carer can request admission for any reason.

You and/or your carer will be able to undertake normal daily activities for you eg washing, dressing.

**What is the day-to-day routine during ambulatory care?**

Ambulatory care is supervised and staffed by senior haematology nurses and doctors who have extensive experience in working with patients receiving chemotherapy and stem cell transplants. Your doctor will see you each day, or every other day, on the Haematology Day Case Unit to ensure that your care is progressing smoothly, make changes to your treatment as necessary and answer any questions you may have.

The Haematology Day Case Unit is open 6 days a week: Monday - Friday 8.00am to 8.00pm and Saturday 8.00am to 4.00pm.

Outside these hours you will continue to have full access (24 hours) to medical and nursing support. This is explained in the section ‘What happens if I become unwell’.

**Daily care will depend on your treatment schedule, the results of your blood tests and how you feel.**

You will be asked to attend the Haematology Day Case Unit at a prearranged time. A schedule for when and what time to come will be given to you when you come for a discussion about ambulatory care before treatment begins.

- Blood tests will be done from your Hickman line or sometimes from a vein in your arm.
Your observations will be checked, eg blood pressure, temperature, weight, pulse rate.

Your fluid intake chart, which you will have been asked to fill in, will be checked.

You will be asked about any symptoms from the chemotherapy treatment you may have experienced, such as sickness or diarrhoea.

A haematology doctor or advanced nurse practitioner (ANP) will review you once the blood results are ready and prescribe any necessary medication such as antibiotics, blood or platelet transfusions.

The nurse will provide you with an update relating to your treatment schedules and your appointment times if they need to alter from what was planned in your schedule. This allows you to plan for visitors, meals, rests/sleeps or anything you may want to do.

Please remember that treatments may sometimes run later than expected, or you may have days where you feel very tired - more so than usual. It is important for you to allow some flexibility for this.

Prior to the end of your care that day, you will be assessed by the nurse caring for you as to whether it is medically safe for you to return to the hospital flat or back home. Again, your safety is of utmost importance to us. If there is any query as to this, it will be discussed with you and your medical team.

The time you spend in the Haematology Day Case Unit will depend on the treatment that you require. This may be a full day if, for example, you need a blood transfusion or intravenous fluids.
What do I need to be aware of during ambulatory care?

It is important that you follow the advice given to you by the Haematology doctors and nurses to help avoid infection and complications when your blood counts are low after chemotherapy.

- **Temperature:** To be taken at 9.00am, 2.00pm, 6.00pm, at bed time and at extra times if you feel unwell or hot.
- **Shower:** You should have a shower every day.
- **Pets:** If you have pets at home you shouldn't let them lick your face, and wash your hands after being in contact. You shouldn't come into contact with your pets' urine or faeces. Pets are not allowed if you are staying in the hospital flat.
- **Hickman line dressing:** Dressings are usually renewed once a week, but can be changed daily if the area around the exit site is infected, or your dressing becomes wet. You will be given advice about this in a separate booklet called 'Caring for my Hickman Line'.
- **Mouth care:** Regular rinsing of the mouth, with water, is very important to remove food and cells that have died due to the chemotherapy given. You should brush your teeth with a soft tooth brush after meals. One of the side effects of the chemotherapy might be that your mouth and throat will become sore and very painful. Any pain relief required will be started with tablets and then may move to needing drugs injected under the skin or as patches placed on, for example, your shoulder. It may be this side effect, known as Mucositis, that may cause you to be admitted as an inpatient.
- **Bleeding:** As the chemotherapy stops the bone marrow from working, your platelet count will be lower than normal. You may have some bleeding, eg from the gums, nosebleeds or bruising. It is very important that you report these signs. Your blood count will
be measured each or every other day. Platelet transfusions will be given if the platelet count is low or you have signs of bleeding.

- **Infection:** As your white count becomes low you will be prone to infections especially of the mouth, the gut and the blood. Signs or symptoms of infection may be a feeling of being generally unwell, shivering, shaking or feeling hot and having a raised temperature. It is very important that you contact someone so that blood cultures can be taken and antibiotic therapy commenced.

If you are at all concerned that you may have an infection, it is very important that you immediately seek medical advice. This is covered in the section 'What if I become unwell during my stay in Ambulatory care?'

- **Medication:** All the medication that you are given is to prevent infections or lessen the side effects of the chemotherapy. It is important that you are able to take your medication at the right times. To help you do this, you will meet the Haematology pharmacist who will explain your medication schedule before you start ambulatory care.

- **Nutrition:** It is very important that you drink two litres of fluid in 24 hours to protect your kidneys following the chemotherapy. If this is not possible then fluids will be given to you via your Hickman line during your visit to the Haematology Day Case unit. Food that is low in bacteria should also be eaten; this is known as a clean diet. You will be given an additional booklet about this.

Meal vouchers will be provided for you and your carer for the following values and can be exchanged for meals in the hospital restaurant which is on D Floor.

- Breakfast £2.00
- Lunch £3.00
- Supper £3.00

Any additional costs must be paid for by yourselves.
You may prefer to go and eat in a restaurant outside of the hospital grounds at your own expense. Please do not eat from food outlets where food is kept warm for long periods of time. You must ask that the food you order is freshly prepared.

You or your carer can cook your own food whilst staying in the hospital flat or at home, as long as you follow the guidelines about having a 'clean diet'. This is described in the booklet 'Dietary advice for patients with neutropenia'. It is advisable not to drink alcohol during your treatment.

- **Cleaning of the flat:** The flat will be cleaned on a daily basis, by hospital staff. The bed linen will be changed every other day unless the bedding is soiled. You and your carer will be expected to keep the flat tidy and wash all the kitchen utensils used. The flat will be given a special clean in between patients.

**What happens at night or the weekend?**

We understand that once your treatment finishes for the day and you return to the hospital flat or home you may feel vulnerable. For this reason we have put in place a number of safety measures.

- You must have a carer with you at all times. This does not have to be the same carer for the duration of your treatment. It is very important that each carer is aware of the complications of your treatment and knows what to do if you are unwell or in an emergency. Therefore each carer must spend time with a Bone Marrow Transplant Coordinator or Senior Haematology Day Care Nurse to read and sign the educational booklet.
- After 6.00pm your medical and nursing notes will be transferred to ward P3. This is to ensure that if you or your carer phones with a query, or you feel unwell, the Haematology team has full access
to your records. Your care for that day is ‘handed over’ to the nurse in charge of the evening and then the night shift enabling a direct point of contact for you.

To access nursing or medical staff for advice you must phone ward P3 or phone the hospital switchboard to ask to bleep the nurse in charge of Ward P3 (see section ‘What if I become unwell during my stay in ambulatory care?’).

A full list of contact numbers are provided at the back of this booklet and also in the hospital flat.

**What if I change my mind about ambulatory care once my treatment starts?**

This is not a problem. If you decide that ambulatory care is not for you or you feel too unwell to be in the hospital flat you will be admitted to the ward without question. So, if this is the case please do not hesitate to discuss this with a doctor or nurse involved in your care.

**What if I become unwell during my stay in ambulatory care?**

It is quite possible that you will feel unwell during your treatment. You may have various symptoms which may not always require hospital admission.

We ask you to look out for the following signs or symptoms:

- shivers or hot flushes
- temperatures close to or above 37.5 degrees centigrade
- persistent episodes of vomiting and / or diarrhoea
- shortness of breath or difficulties with your breathing
- painful mouth or throat
- signs of bleeding.
Please remember: It is important to note that if you or your carer develop symptoms of a cold, ie coughing, sneezing, runny nose etc, you must telephone the Haematology Day Case Unit or ward P3 before you arrive so that we can organise an area for you to sit, so you do not mix with other patients and their carers. However, you might feel unwell or "not right" in other ways. Here is what we advise:

Daytime: (During Haematology Day Case opening hours: 8.00am-8.00pm Mon-Fri and 8.00am-4.00pm on Saturday)

- If possible, come over to the Haematology Day Case Unit as you normally would to see a doctor or nurse.
- If this is not possible, phone the contact numbers you have been given straight away and we will decide the course of action. Transport will be arranged to bring you to the Haematology Day Case Unit or the in-patient Haematology ward at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital.
- Once you have been reviewed by the nurse or doctor, it may be necessary to admit you to Ward P3. This is to ensure you are monitored more closely and receive the necessary treatments such as fluids or antibiotics.

Night time and weekends: (ie outside of Haematology Day Case opening hours and on Sundays and Bank Holidays).

If at any time you or your carer need to seek medical advice, you must first contact the nurse in charge of Ward P3 via the direct ward telephone number or the bleep via switchboard.

The nurse in charge of the ward will then contact the Haematology doctor on call who will contact you and give you advice or arrange for you to be admitted as an inpatient.

Use the telephone numbers you have been given to contact ward P3 or the hospital switchboard (to contact the nurse in charge of Ward P3).
If you are not well enough to travel by car to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, an ambulance will be arranged to transport you.

**What if it is an emergency?**

An emergency is any urgent situation where you require life-saving medical attention.

*If you require life saving attention, you or your carer must phone 999*

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**Where is the hospital flat and what should I bring for my stay?**

You will be provided with the address of the hospital flat prior to your admission date. The flat is no more than a 10 minute walk from the main hospital entrance (B Floor).

A general guide on what to bring with you:

- day clothes
- night wear
- toiletries - to include a new soft toothbrush
- mobile phone and charger for personal calls
- thermometer (If you have one)
- Sheffield A-Z (if you want to do some exploring of Sheffield, we can supply you with a local map of the area).
- books, magazines, games etc.
The hospital flat facilities are:

- kitchen with microwave, washer/dryer machine, oven, cooking utensils
- living room with TV with Freeview, DVD player
- 2 bedrooms
- shower and separate toilet
- ground floor

You are welcome to use a laptop in the hospital flat, but you will need to provide your own access for the internet as 'wi-fi' is not available at present.

Remember that you may be admitted to hospital. For this reason, make sure that your luggage can easily be transported to the hospital by you or your carer.

Please note also that if you are admitted to hospital, your carer will be required to check out of the flat as soon as possible.
Are there car parking facilities?

If you are staying in the flat, you will be allocated a space to park outside the flat for the duration of your stay.

Unfortunately we are unable to offer free parking. If you are travelling from home, we aim to ensure that you receive a reduction to your parking fee. This is dependent on the length of time that you spend in the hospital and will be discussed when you attend for the education session.
**Ambulatory care contacts**

Use these numbers if you require help, advice or assistance at any time.

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**Haematology Day Case Unit**  
(Mon-Fri: 8.00am - 8.00pm and Saturday: 8.00am-4.00pm)

0114 271 3607

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**Ward P3**

0114 271 3626  
0114 226 8704

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**Hospital switchboard**

0114 271 1900

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**Nurse in charge Ward P3**

Ring hospital switchboard and ask for bleep 2082

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**Bone marrow transplant coordinators**

0114 271 2263 or ring hospital switchboard and ask for bleep 2282

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**Ambulatory Care Coordinator**

0114 226 1250

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**Emergency number**

999