

# Why is My Chemotherapy Taking so Long? Taking the Time to do it Right

**Pharmacy Department  
Clinical Support Services**

**This leaflet has been designed to give you important information about your condition / procedure, and to answer some common queries that you may have.**



# Information for patients and visitors

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## Introduction

Have you ever wondered how your chemotherapy is made, or why it seems such a long process when you attend for your chemotherapy treatment?

This information may help you understand what is involved in preparing the chemotherapy you receive.

## Why does making a dose of chemotherapy take so long?

It might seem that little is happening but there is a lot of vital preparation going on behind the scenes to prepare your chemotherapy. Improperly made chemotherapy can be harmful to you and others.

## Your Chemotherapy must be sterile (germ free)

Chemotherapy can suppress your ability to fight infections. The chemotherapy must be sterile, so you do not get infected by the chemotherapy as it is administered into your body. The following ensures your chemotherapy is sterile:

A piece of equipment called isolator (cabinet) is used to make the chemotherapy. The cabinet is located inside a specially designed clean room that is strictly controlled and monitored.



The person making your chemotherapy must wear a coverall made of special fabric, protective overshoes, a mask, a cap and two

layers of chemotherapy gloves. They are not allowed to wear cosmetics while making the chemotherapy or make the chemotherapy if they have any signs of infection.

Daily, monthly and annual checks and tests are carried out to ensure the sterility of the rooms, staff and the equipment used to make your chemotherapy. This sometimes has to be done during working hours and delays might occur.



## Your Chemotherapy must be accurate

The chemotherapy must be right, which means that it must be the right drug and the right dose.

We must be 100 % accurate. There is no room for error with chemotherapy so several checks are undertaken during the different steps in making your chemotherapy.

## It can take 30 to 90 minutes to make one dose of chemotherapy

Depending on the treatment and dose we might need to manipulate one or several vials to prepare your chemotherapy. Some drugs are powders and need time to dissolve. Also, most patients receive more than one drug (sometimes up to six drugs). If you participate in a Clinical Trial there might be some extra paperwork or processes to be completed before preparation can begin.

It takes time to clean and prepare the special room and isolator (cabinet) at the beginning of the day and this may cause delays if your



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chemotherapy is amongst the first items to be prepared.

All pharmacy staff involved in making your chemotherapy are specially trained. Occasionally, if a new trainee is working, extra time and supervision is required.

### What's involved in making your chemotherapy?

- A) The doctor prescribes your chemotherapy**
- B) A specially trained nurse reviews the order** and sends it to the pharmacy. She / he will also ensure that you are well enough to have your chemotherapy and will review your blood results.
- C) A specially trained pharmacist checks your prescription to ensure that the treatment is suitable and all the doses are correct for you.** The pharmacist also reviews your blood results to ensure the dose you have been prescribed is appropriate.
- D) The pharmacist enters the order into the computer system.** The computer system prints the labels, which will be attached to the bag or syringe of chemotherapy and a record sheet (worksheet) which gives instructions for how to make your chemotherapy.
- E) A pharmacy support worker will gather the components** including the drugs, needles, syringes, alcohol wipes and the containers of chemotherapy. The batch numbers and expiry dates of all the components are recorded on the worksheet. This allows a full traceability of all the components used to make your chemotherapy.
- F) The label, worksheet, components and calculations are reviewed by a pharmacy technician** to ensure they are accurate.
- G) The supplies, labels and worksheet have to be disinfected before going into the aseptic area.** A pharmacy support worker will disinfect them with sterile alcohol before being passed into a sterile "clean room" through a special hatch.
- H) The chemotherapy is made by a pharmacy support worker in the isolator.** If the drug comes as a powder, a solution has to be used to dissolve the powder. It can take time to dissolve the powder. A syringe is then used to remove the exact amount of chemotherapy from the vial or ampoule.
- The staff member then adds the chemotherapy dose to a bag of fluid or to a syringe. Some drugs require gentle and careful handling and their preparation will take longer. A label is then attached to the bag or syringe.
- I) A pharmacist authorises the chemotherapy for use after checking that all the steps and processes followed were correct.** If there is an error, the medicine is thrown out and the process re-starts.



- J) Finally the chemotherapy is transported to the administration area.** This can take from 10 to 30 minutes.



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### Why do some patients that arrive after me receive their chemotherapy before I do?

- A) **Some drugs can be prepared in advance** rather than on the day of treatment. It depends on the type of drug, the shelf life and cost.
- B) **Some drugs come already made** and do not need to be made in pharmacy.
- C) **There may have been a query in your prescription** which has taken time to resolve.
- D) **Occasionally**, your dose will have changed after you see the doctor or nurse at arrival and **your chemotherapy may have to be re-made** even if it's been made in advance.
- E) **Their blood results were available before yours.** Pharmacy cannot make the drug until your laboratory values are available.

#### Please remember:

- A) We do our best to stay on time but there can occasionally be unavoidable delays at the blood lab, pharmacy or the chemotherapy unit.
- B) You can help the process and prevent delays by having your blood test done 48 hours before your chemotherapy appointment.
- C) "Timely" does not mean fast. Timely means no more time than is required to make sure that your chemotherapy is carefully prepared- accurate, sterile, and safe for you and the staff.

Pharmacy currently makes chemotherapy from Monday to Friday (9:00 am to 5:00 pm). No service is provided on weekends and Bank Holidays. Delays may occur on

Mondays and the day following a Bank Holiday.

We apologise for any delays in advance. Your patience is much appreciated.

### Concerns and Queries

If you have any concerns / queries about any of the services offered by the Trust, in the first instance, please speak to the person providing your care.

#### For Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital

Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01472) 875403 or at the PALS office which is situated near the main entrance.

#### For Scunthorpe General Hospital

Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01724) 290132 or at the PALS office which is situated on C Floor.

Alternatively you can email:  
[nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

### Confidentiality

Information on NHS patients is collected in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons (e.g. providing care and treatment, managing and planning the NHS, training and educating staff, research etc.).

Everyone working for the NHS has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential. Information will only ever be shared with people who have a genuine need for it (e.g. your GP or other professionals from whom you have been receiving care) or if the law requires it, for example, to notify a birth.



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Please be assured however that anyone who receives information from us is also under a legal duty to keep it confidential.

### **Zero Tolerance - Violent, Threatening and Abusive Behaviour**

The Trust and its staff are committed to providing high quality care to patients within the department. However, we wish to advise all patients / visitors that the following inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated:

- Swearing
- Threatening / abusive behaviour
- Verbal / physical abuse

The Trust reserves the right to withdraw from treating patients whom are threatening / abusive / violent and ensuring the removal of those persons from the premises.

All acts of criminal violence and aggression will be notified to the Police immediately.

### **Risk Management Strategy**

The Trust welcomes comments and suggestions from patients and visitors that could help to reduce risk.

Perhaps you have experienced something whilst in hospital, whilst attending as an outpatient or as a visitor and you felt at risk.

Please tell a member of staff on the ward or in the department you are attending / visiting.

### **Moving & Handling**

The Trust operates a Minimal Lifting Policy, which in essence means patients are only ever lifted by nursing staff in an emergency situation.

Patients are always encouraged to help themselves as much as possible when

mobilising, and if unable to do so, equipment may be used to assist in their safe transfer.

If you have any questions regarding moving and handling of patients within the Trust, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department you are visiting.

### **Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust**

**Diana Princess of Wales Hospital**  
Scartho Road  
Grimsby  
01472 874111

**Scunthorpe General Hospital**  
Cliff Gardens  
Scunthorpe  
01724 282282

**Goole & District Hospital**  
Woodland Avenue  
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01405 720720

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