

Endocrinology department

# Photodynamic therapy (PDT)

Endocrine Unit and PDT - department 63

## What is PDT?

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is a method of treating localised skin abnormalities and cancers. The treatment consists of applying a special cream, Metvix (ALA) to the skin growth and 4 - 6 hours later shining a pure red light on it.

## Why is PDT better than other treatments?

We have carefully considered all the other treatment options for your condition. There are many factors that we have to take into account. The most important benefits are:

- **Initial** healing is usually very rapid since there is only slight damage to the healthy cells.
- **Final** healing with PDT is usually excellent, so that the treatment can be repeated if necessary.
- The cosmetic result is very good.

## Are there any risks with PDT?

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

- Normally we need to leave the cream on for 4 - 6 hours to allow it to soak in as deeply as possible. During this time you may stay at the hospital and have lunch (dining room or Marks and Spencer coffee shop in the Oak Road entrance) or return home and come back to the hospital later.
- There may be some slight discomfort during and after treatment, so we usually give an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the immediate area just before treatment.
- If your skin growth is very thick and penetrating deeply into the normal tissues, you may need a second treatment a month after the first. Occasionally, a third treatment may be needed.

## Are there any alternatives to PDT?

It is sometimes possible to have surgery or radiotherapy, but as we described earlier, the results of PDT are usually very good.

## What will happen if I do not have any treatment?

The growth on your skin will not usually heal without treatment, and if it is a skin cancer, it will continue to grow.

## What will happen to me when I attend for my treatment?

First of all, it is important that you arrive on the Tuesday morning from 8:30am.

**Go straight to the Endocrine unit and PDT (department 63) and check in there.**



- You will have an ultrasound scan of your skin growth. This is totally painless and only takes a few minutes. This scan is to assess how thick the growth is and how far it has penetrated into the normal skin.
- We will remove any crusts overlying the skin growth, otherwise the cream will not be able to penetrate into it.
- We will then apply the special photosensitising cream and place a dressing over this to keep the ordinary light out. It is essential that you do not disturb or press on this dressing so as not to spread the cream.
- We will give you a time to come back in the afternoon. **Return directly to Endocrine unit and PDT (department 63).**

### **After 4 to 6 hours:**

- We will take off the dressing and remove the cream remaining on the surface of the abnormal area and take a photograph.
- We will give you a local anaesthetic injection around this area to numb it.
- We will shine a pure red light onto the growth. The treatment only works on the area on which the cream has been applied.
- If the treatment is near the eyes, they will be shielded from the light. We want you to be as comfortable as possible, as it is important that you do not move during the treatment.
- Treatment takes from 20 - 45 minutes overall, depending on how big the affected area is. There is very often a feeling of tingling during the treatment. Some people find the treatment quite painful. It is important to tell us if you feel any pain. We can usually relieve this for you with another local anaesthetic injection.
- At the end of the treatment, we will put soothing (hydrocortisone) cream on the treated area and a dressing over this. We will give you some hydrocortisone cream for use at home, if needed.

### **What do I do when I return home?**

- You must keep the dressing on until the following evening. This is to avoid more light getting into the treated area.
- There is usually little pain, but if the treated area *is* uncomfortable, lift a corner of the dressing and apply more of the hydrocortisone cream.
- In some patients there may be some temporary swelling and redness around the treated area. This usually settles down over a few days.
- After the dressing has been removed, the treated area will probably crust over. Healing takes place under this crust, so do not disturb it. The crust will eventually fall off naturally when the area underneath has healed.
- After the first 24 hours or so, you can wash, bathe or shower as usual. It is important that you do not rub the treated area, but gently dab it dry.

**If you are visited by your GP or home nurses in the days after treatment, please show them this leaflet.**

### **Will I need to come again?**

**If your skin growth was very thin:** we will send you an appointment for 6 - 8 weeks time on a **Monday afternoon - Outpatients department 22**. At this follow-up visit:

- You will see a doctor.
- We will do another ultrasound scan.
- If all is well, we will need to see you at intervals to make sure that the growth has not come back. If we find that small areas are beginning to come back, you will need a further PDT treatment.

**If your skin growth was thick:** we will send you an appointment to come for another treatment in about a month's time, on a **Tuesday morning**. Check in at **Endocrine unit and PDT (department 63)**.

## Contacting The Christie

If you have any problems or would like to ask any further questions **on your own skin growth**, please contact:

Dr Andrew Sykes, Consultant clinical oncologist - **0161 446 3413**

Laura Foster, Advance practice radiographer - **0161 446 8561**

Helen Beard, secretary - **0161 446 3354**  
(to make or change an appointment)

Macmillan Cancer Support - **0800 808 0000**  
**[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

