Angiosarcoma of the Skin

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What is this booklet about?

This booklet is designed to give you information about angiosarcoma of the skin and how it may be treated. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your doctor but helps you to understand more about what is discussed.

If you have been diagnosed at your local hospital, your care will be transferred to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham as it is a specialist centre that has knowledge and expertise in treating and managing angiosarcoma and other rare skin cancers.

If you have further questions please contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS). You should have been given the details of your CNS but if you have not, please ask your doctor’s secretary to provide them.

What is Angiosarcoma?

Angiosarcoma is a cancer of the inner lining of blood vessels and it can occur in any area of the body, but most commonly occurs in the skin. It is usually found on the scalp and face. Angiosarcomas occur in men and women of all races and they are rare in children. The cause of angiosarcoma is not clear although it has been related to lymphoedema, radiotherapy treatment and exposure to some chemicals. Angiosarcoma can spread very quickly so it is important for it to be diagnosed and treated quickly.

What does Angiosarcoma look like?

Angiosarcoma can look like a skin infection, a bruise or a lesion that does not heal or it may appear as a soft lump and may be a purple colour.
How is it diagnosed?

Your diagnosis will have been confirmed by taking a biopsy of the lesion.

The doctor may also examine the rest of your skin, your lymph nodes and will take note of any past illnesses and current medications.

You may be offered a CT scan as this is a rare form of skin cancer and it is helpful to have a baseline scan for comparison should we need it in the future. It is unlikely that we will find anything of concern on this scan, however if we do then we may need to complete further investigations. You may be given written information explaining what a CT scan involves.

Other scans such as MRI scans or ultrasound scans may be required to clarify the extent of the disease and help to plan treatment. You will be given information about these scans if they are required.

What is the treatment?

Angiosarcomas are usually treated with surgery, either with or without chemotherapy.

Surgery may be used to remove the cancer cells and some healthy tissue around it. You may be given a separate leaflet explaining more about the type of surgery which would be suitable for you. Chemotherapy may be used before surgery to shrink the lesion to make it easier to operate, or after surgery if there are particular features of your angiosarcoma that make us concerned that it has a high risk of recurring. Your oncology doctor will give you written information about the type of chemotherapy that is recommended.

Your doctor will also discuss any alternative treatment options with you.
What happens after treatment?

You will be asked to attend follow-up appointments with a dermatologist or oncologist every 3 months for 3 years then every 6 months until 5 years after your treatment. At these appointments your skin and lymph nodes will be examined for any signs of spread. If angiosarcoma spreads it usually spreads first to nearby tissues or lymph nodes and then may spread to distant parts of the body. You will also be taught to examine your own skin and lymph nodes in between follow-up appointments.

What happens if my cancer spreads?

If your cancer spreads what happens will depend on where it has spread to and how much disease there is. You may be offered chemotherapy. If you have any signs of recurrence please contact your CNS on the number you have been given.

Your doctors will discuss the options in detail and you will be given further written information as appropriate.

The role of your CNS

Your CNS (sometimes called key worker) is an experienced skin oncology nurse who works with the other members of the team to provide specialist medical and psychological care to people with angiosarcoma and their families.

The role of your CNS is to coordinate any investigations, treatment and follow-up care during your cancer journey. They are there to clarify any information, discuss matters that are important to you, provide emotional support and refer to other professionals if required. It is very important that you are able to have your questions answered and concerns discussed; your CNS will make every effort to ensure this.
You will be given a contact telephone number for the CNS so that you are able to contact them should you have any worries or need further information when at home. If you have not been given this, please ask your consultant or contact their secretary for the details.

It may help to write down questions as you think of them so that you have them ready. It may also help to bring someone with you when you attend your outpatient appointments.

Local sources of further information:

You can visit any of the health/cancer information centres listed below:

**University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust**
The Patrick Room, Cancer Centre
Heritage Building, Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Birmingham, B15 2TH
**Tel:** 0121 371 3539/3537

**Health Information Centre**
Birmingham Heartlands Hospital
Bordesley Green
Birmingham, B9 5SS
**Tel:** 0121 424 2280

**Patient Information Centre**
Good Hope Hospital
Rectory Road
Sutton Coldfield, B75 7RR
**Tel:** 0121 424 9946
About this information

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Every effort is taken to ensure that this information is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication. We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our information. If you have a suggestion about how this information can be improved, please contact us via our website.
Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.
The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.