Contact telephone numbers

Further information and advice is available from:

North of England Cancer Network – 0191 4971482
www.cancernorth.nhs.uk

Cancerbackup – 0808 800 1234
www.cancerbackup.org.uk

Macmillan – 0808 808 2020
www.macmillan.org.uk

Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression
Information for patients

For the doctor or healthcare professional:

- This patient has cancer and is therefore at risk of MSCC.

- If they have any of the symptoms listed then please consider MSCC as a possible diagnosis and discuss further management with the local MSCC Co-ordinator (telephone – xxxxx xxxxxx).
Introduction

Sometimes when people have cancer it can spread to the spinal column and cause the spinal nerves to be squeezed. This leaflet is not intended to scare you but to help you recognise the important symptoms to report early so that tests and treatment may be done as soon as possible. When the spinal nerves are squeezed it can cause damage to the spinal cord to the point of complete paralysis from the neck, chest or waist down. This is called Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC) and is quite rare and unlikely to affect you, but it is very important to pick it up quickly as the earlier treatments are started the better the result usually is.

MSCC only occurs in a small number of people.

Symptoms to watch out for:

- Back pain in areas of your spine that is severe, distressing or different from your usual pain (especially if it affects the upper spine or neck)
- Severe increasing pain in the spine that changes when:
  - lying down or standing up
  - lifting or straining
  - it wakes you at night or prevents sleep
- Pain which starts in the spine and goes around the chest or abdomen
- Pain down the leg or arm
- A new feeling of clumsiness or weakness of the arms or legs or difficulty walking
- Numbness in the arms / hands or legs / feet
- Difficulty with urinating (not being able to pass urine or being aware that you have passed urine) or problems with controlling bowel function

If you have any of these symptoms:

- Speak with a health professional as soon as is practical (certainly within 24 hours)
- Tell them that you have cancer, are worried about your spine and would like to see a doctor
- Show the doctor this leaflet
- Try to bend your back as little as possible

The earlier MSCC is diagnosed, the better the chances of the treatment being effective.

What will happen next?

If your doctor is concerned that your spinal nerves are being squeezed (spinal cord compression) he or she will usually send you straight to hospital, so that you can have an urgent scan and start the right treatment.