

How can I support cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic? Advice for community pharmacists

What advice should I give about self-isolation?

Patients who are currently receiving, or have recently completed cancer treatment are in the vulnerable group and need to self-isolate; some are extremely vulnerable and will need to take additional precautions:

- Those undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- Those with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- Those having immunotherapy, antibody treatments or oral targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system
- Those who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.

A useful patient information leaflet can be found [here](#)

My patient is worried about continuing their cancer treatment – what should I advise?

Patients should be reassured that hospitals (private and NHS) will aim to continue to provide cancer treatments as normal; however, treatment plans may be altered to reduce the risk of the patient being hospitalised during the pandemic. Alterations include changing treatment doses, offering breaks or offering oral treatment; these decisions will be made by the clinical team on assessment of risks and benefits of treatment, factoring in the additional risk of COVID-19 infection. If patients are uncertain about continuing with their treatment, they should be encouraged to contact their cancer team (usually via their clinical nurse specialist) who will be happy to discuss their options.

Telephone or video consultations in place of clinic appointments, and arranging for oral cancer treatments to be delivered to the patient's home or collected, for example from hospital car parks are ways to avoid unnecessary visits to the hospital. These strategies are recommended by NICE (click [here](#) for details).

What else can I do to help?

As patients reduce their hospital visits they may run short of supportive medicines and need to obtain supplies via their GP and community pharmacy. Community pharmacies can help supply anti-emetics, mouthcare preparations, emollients, antibiotics and steroids via home delivery where possible. If you have any queries about medicines prescribed for cancer patients, contact the pharmacy department of their treating hospital. Patients should be advised to discard outer packaging and wash their hands with soap and water after receiving a delivery. Information on management of side effects and symptoms can be found [here](#)

Where can I go for further advice?

BOPA is giving all free members access to the general forum (where you can post questions and ask for advice from other members), all e-learning modules and all resources for 3 months in support of our pharmacy colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please register for free here:

<https://www.bopa.org.uk/join-bopa/>