

Administration of Oral Systemic Therapy for Cancer

A Quick Reference for Home Care/Primary Care Nurses

Oral systemic therapy for cancer is HIGH RISK medication and therefore must be prepared, administered and handled according to specific guidelines.¹

Oral cytotoxic/biologic agents should be labeled as hazardous drugs by pharmacy, highlighting the need for safe handling.

It is recommended that oral systemic therapy for cancer only be administered by nurses knowledgeable about the drug, cytotoxic precautions, management of expected toxicities and other care required by oncology patients.

Registered Nurses should be responsible for the administration of oral systemic therapy in the instances of:

- Administration of first cycles
- Administration of doses if new toxicities are identified and/or doses require modification
- Administration of clinical trial drugs
- Administration of drugs to patients with unstable clinical status or unpredictable outcomes

Nurses administering oral cancer systemic therapy should follow these instructions:

1. Prior to administering the medication:

- Review the appropriate Medication Information Sheet.
- Review your organization's Safe Handling Policy/Guideline.
- Review the Cytotoxic Precautions at Home booklet.
- Ensure the medication has been ordered by an oncologist (or designate) and includes the patients' name, route, drug dosage and frequency of administration.

2. Patients will be assessed prior to each treatment cycle and in between cycles as clinically indicated¹. Please refer to the medication information sheets for specific drug toxicity profiles. The assessment may include (but is not limited to):

- Weight changes (has the patient lost or gained any weight recently). Any weight changes of +/- 10% should be reported to the Oncologist.
- Vital Signs (recent fever, shortness of breath, etc.)
- History, physical and side effects (any changes from baseline)
- Functional status (any change from baseline in ability to complete ADL's)
- Lab values
- Psychosocial impact on patient and family

¹ *Cancer Care Nova Scotia (CCNS)*. (2014). Oral Systemic Therapy for Cancer Standards of Practice. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Province of Nova Scotia

It is important that any changes in the patient's condition be discussed with the Oncologist prior to administration.

3. Crushing or opening of oral systemic therapy pills/capsules should only be done in pharmacy.
4. Wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE):
 - When handling medication in a tablet/pill form, nitrile gloves must be worn.
 - When handling medication in a liquid form a face shield/goggles, chemotherapy gown and nitrile gloves must be worn.
5. Inform the patient of the medication they are receiving and reinforce the toxicities/side effects they should advise their Nurse of (refer to Medication Information Sheet).
6. Once the drug is administered, the medication cup/syringe is to be discarded along with the nitrile gloves and the PPE. This waste should be double bagged and placed curbside for pickup, along with regular garbage.
7. Wash your hands as per your organization's policy.
8. Document the patient assessment and administration of medication as per your organization's policy.
9. Initiate cytotoxic precautions for the required period. Ensure that:
 - Appropriate patient/family education is provided. (refer to Medication Information Sheet and Cytotoxic Precautions at Home booklet)
10. Monitor the patient for related toxicities and side effects (refer to the Medication Information Sheet), contact the Oncologist if the patient experiences any.

Home Care nurses who administer oral systemic therapy for cancer are encouraged to review the resources in *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* Oral Systemic Therapy for Cancer Toolkit for Nurses available on *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* website www.cancercare.ns.ca

For additional information please contact your designated Oncology Practice Consultant:

- In CBDHA, PCHA, CHA & GASHA: Michele Rogez RN, BScN, AE (C), CON(C), (902) 567-8555
- In all other DHAs Kara Henman RN, MN, CON(C), (902) 473-1796