

ST PAUL'S EYE UNIT

PATIENT INFORMATION

General medical care after the treatment of intraocular melanoma

What is the 'special test' and why is it performed?

After the tumour is removed (by enucleation [removal of the eye] or local resection) it is processed and examined under the microscope by a pathologist. This pathological examination is standard practice and serves two purposes:

- To confirm the diagnosis.
- To give a very approximate idea of the chances of tumour recurring in other parts of the body.

The 'special test' refers to so-called cytogenetic investigations, which identify DNA abnormalities arising within the tumour. These give a much more accurate indication of the chances of future recurrence. This 'special test' is performed on a fresh sample of tumour, which needs to be collected minutes after the end of the operation. This is why it is necessary for you to tell us before your operation whether or not you would like to have this test. Remember, if you decide to have this test you still have one or two weeks in which to re-think your decision. However, if you decide before the operation that you do not want to have this test then it would not be possible to do the test if you later change your mind.

How 'foolproof' is the test?

When the laboratory procedure is completed successfully, (as is usually the case) this test gives a very strong indication of the chances of tumour recurrence outside the eye within the first five years of ocular treatment. Because this test is so new, we are unable to give you any information on the meaning of any results after a longer period. The technique involves growing a sample of live tumour in a 'test-tube'. If the tumour fails to grow, then the test cannot be completed. Such an occurrence, which is rare, does not allow any conclusions to be drawn about prognosis. No test is 100% accurate so that it is possible for tumour recurrence to develop despite an encouraging result, and vice versa.

Should I have the 'special test' to know whether the tumour is likely to recur outside the eye?

Instead of being told that there is a 50-50 chance of tumour recurring within a certain time after your operation, the special test will tell you whether the chances of tumour recurrence within five years are very high or very low. Everybody would be reassured by the news that there is only a very small chance of tumour recurrence; however, not everyone would like to know that there is a very high chance of tumour coming back in the liver or another part of the body. Most patients want to know of a poor prognosis so that they can see a specialist and get advice on having investigations aimed at detecting any spread as early as possible. They also want to know about any treatments available. Several patients have told us that they want to know about a poor prognosis, whether or not any treatment is available, for non-medical reasons. Patients who have developed tumour recurrence in the liver have told us that they have not regretted having the test.

How would I like to be informed of the result of this test and the significance of this result?

Ideally, you would attend the outpatient clinic of the medical oncologist with whom we collaborate closely. This is Dr Ernie Marshall at Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology on the Wirral Peninsula. Dr Marshall has a great deal of experience in this field and is well placed to explain the meaning of the results of the special test and how your care could progress. He would be able to advise on the best strategy for screening for recurrent disease and discuss the current situation regarding treatment. Irrespective of the result of your special test, we will ask Dr Marshall's secretary to make a provisional appointment for you to attend his clinic.

If you are unable to see Dr Marshall then please inform his secretary who will ask your general practitioner to arrange for you to consult a medical oncologist near your home. When you see the medical oncologist you will need to plan your further care.

How can I find out about detecting any tumour spread as early as possible and about treatment of such tumour spread?

The medical oncologist is the best person to advise you about the detection of tumour spread and the treatment that might be available for any tumour recurrence outside the eye.

Where can I have any such examinations and treatment?

If you are able to attend Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology on a regular basis, then we will perform further examinations and treatment would be administered at this hospital; otherwise, you will receive further care at your own hospital.