



***PATIENT  
INFORMATION***

**Management of Hot Flashes in  
Patients  
Treated for Breast Cancer**

Radiotherapy information for Torbay Hospital  
patients

## **Introduction**

Many breast cancers require the presence of the hormone oestrogen to grow. Your doctor will be able to tell you if your cancer was hormone dependant. It is likely that you were told this at your initial consultation.

A lack of oestrogen will cause hot flushes which occur naturally at the time of the menopause and can take anything from a few months to a few years to settle down.

The worst hot flushes are often experienced by those patients who have been on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and who have had to stop HRT once a diagnosis of breast cancer has been made. Chemotherapy causes the periods to stop quickly, this often results in very troublesome hot flushes.

A patient who has had treatment for an oestrogen dependant breast cancer cannot be given any hormone replacement therapy. This makes overcoming hot flushes, very difficult as they are due to the lack of oestrogen. There are other effects due to the lack of oestrogen notably aches and pains in the knees, shoulder, elbow and ankle joints.

## **Medication**

### **Clonidine (Dixarit)**

This is a drug for migraine which if used in a low dose can help some patients. The starting dose is 50 micrograms rising after 2 weeks to 75 micrograms.

### **Venlafaxine**

This is an old antidepressant which in a low dose appears to reduce hot flushes for some people.

Although there are a lot of the listed side effects, this is for the full antidepressant dose. The recommended dose for hot flushes is 37.5 mg as compared to 150 mg for depression.

## **Megestrol**

This is a progesterone type hormone and in a low dose can ease hot flushes. At higher doses this drug may cause weight gain and thrombosis.

## **Lifestyle changes**

It is difficult to make much impact by changing your lifestyle, although some patients do find that alcohol and spicy foods make them worse.

## **Herbal Remedies**

There are a wide range of herbal remedies claiming to relieve hot flushes and in a number of cases this will be true. However, those remedies which do work are likely to contain oestrogen in plant form, such as that derived from red clover, sage or any product containing phytoestrogens. Until we have a better understanding of phytoestrogens we cannot recommend them for the treatment of hot flushes, if you have had a hormone dependent breast cancer.

Oil of Evening Primrose appears safe and does help some people

## **For further information please contact**

**Macmillan Radiographer      01803 654273**