

Contact details

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

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Torbay and South Devon
NHS Foundation Trust

PATIENT INFORMATION

Rituximab Treatment and its use in Auto Immune Disease

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

Rituximab

Rituximab is a type of drug called a monoclonal antibody. In some conditions B-cells produce antibodies which attack the body's own cells. Rituximab works by removing the cells (B cells) which produce the antibodies.

It was first developed as an anti-cancer drug, but is now commonly used for auto immune disorders, including Immune Thrombocytopenia (ITP), Auto Immune Haemolytic Anaemia (AIHA) and acquired haemophilia (AHA).

In your situation it is being used to treat immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), auto immune haemolytic anaemia (AIHA), Acquired Haemophilia A (AHA). It is given after other therapies have been tried e.g. steroids and response has been variable.

In ITP there is an estimated partial response rate of 60% and a complete response in 40%. A sustained response i.e. greater than 3-5 years and is seen in 15-20% of patients. Rituximab may be used again depending upon the duration of the previous response achieved.

The effects of treatment can be seen up to 8 weeks post the infusion.

The response in AIHA and AHA will be monitored throughout the treatment.

It is given as a weekly infusion, intravenously (into a vein) for four weeks; at a dose of usually 100mg. Steroids are sometimes also given.

The first infusion will take a few hours, subsequent infusions will take less time.

It is given as an out-patient on our day unit (Ricky Grant Day Unit).

Rituximab side effects:

- A few people experience a fever, wheeziness, rash, fall in blood pressure, during the infusion. In order to help prevent this you will be given medication prior to the start of treatment. The infusion will be given slowly and if you feel unwell the infusion will be stopped and restarted at a slower rate. Very occasionally if the symptoms are severe the infusion will be stopped.
- As Rituximab affects your immune system you will be at increased risk of infection. You will receive information about this.
- Prior to treatment you will have various blood tests taken to look at viral infections. Rituximab may reactivate these if they are present and is therefore not given in this situation.
- In very rare cases virus reactivation can result in a serious condition called progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), which can damage the brain and spinal cord.
- Other virology such as: hepatitis status will also be checked.
- Rituximab affects your immune system. You will be given more written information about what to do if you feel unwell.
- Fertility- we do not know the effect Rituximab might have on an unborn baby. It is advised that you avoid becoming pregnant whilst having Rituximab and for 12 months post treatment