

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Acute and chronic pain control

Pain Management Team

Patient Information



NHS

How does the Pain Management Team help patients?

The Pain Management Team at The Royal Marsden use a bio-psycho-social approach to managing pain due to cancer. We understand that cancer pain impacts not only on you but also on your relatives, friends and carers, potentially causing distress and worry. We provide support, advice and treatment which address all of these areas leading to improved pain, quality of life and rehabilitation.

Day-to-day we deal with different types of pain caused both by the cancer but also due to the treatments for the cancer such as chemotherapy and surgery. Pain can broadly be divided into two types – acute (which is generally short lasting) and chronic or persistent (pain present for longer than two to three months). The options available to us vary depending on the pain type, so a comprehensive assessment by a pain specialist is useful in deciding upon the best treatment for you.

Acute pain

Following surgery, your pain is actively monitored and treated by the Pain Management Team in conjunction with ward staff. Analgesic (pain-relieving) treatments offered include oral medications, injections, epidurals and patient-controlled analgesia machines. Patients having radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy may also be seen by the pain management team for the management of treatment-related acute pain. Our goal when managing acute pain is to ensure comfort, improve recovery times and minimise potential complications.

Chronic or persistent pain

Patients with long-standing cancer pain problems (such as painful nerve damage due to chemotherapy or longstanding pain after surgery) may receive treatment as an outpatient. The main treatment methods include oral analgesics, topical analgesics, links with psychological support, massage therapy,

occupational therapy, physiotherapy, interventional therapies (such as nerve blocks) and stimulation-induced analgesia such as acupuncture and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).

How can I be referred to The Pain Management Team?

You will need to speak with your clinical team and ask to be referred to the pain team.

Western Medical Acupuncture

What is Western Medical Acupuncture?

Acupuncture developed in China over 2000 years ago and Western Medical Acupuncture represents a blend of conventional medical approaches (diagnosis and the understanding of how acupuncture causes its effects) and traditional Chinese techniques (sites and approaches to needling). Western Medical Acupuncture is delivered by specialised clinicians who have undergone relevant training and takes a scientific approach to the treatments which are delivered.

How does acupuncture work?

The introduction of small needles into the skin and muscles is thought to cause effects in a number of ways. Firstly, local effects such as increased blood flow may occur. Secondly, chemicals called neurotransmitters may be released in the spinal cord and the brain, resulting in a number of effects such as reduced pain and anxiety.

What does acupuncture feel like?

The needles used for acupuncture are very small, (much smaller than those used to take blood) and their insertion is commonly painless. The needles are left in for between five and 30 minutes during the treatment – during this time, some patients experience a warm feeling but this is rarely unpleasant.

Acupuncture is normally delivered over a course of 6–10 treatments.

What can acupuncture be used for and who can have it?

Acupuncture has a range of benefits in patients with cancer; these include pain relief, reduced anxiety, increased energy levels, reduced hot flushes and increased saliva production. There are very few reasons a patient cannot have acupuncture treatment and this is discussed with patients before their first treatment. Acupuncture is available for both NHS and private patients. For private patients, the majority of medical insurance companies will fund a course of acupuncture; additionally a self-pay option is available. Please check with your insurance company to find out your options.

Where can I receive acupuncture?

We offer acupuncture treatment at both the Chelsea and Sutton sites. If you are interested in receiving this treatment, then it can be requested via a referral from your clinical team on your behalf.



Contact details

For those under private care who are interested in being referred for acupuncture treatment, please contact:

Pain Management Team PA: 020 7808 2771

For NHS patients interested in being referred for acupuncture or for any other queries, please speak to your clinical team caring for you and they can advise further.

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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