The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

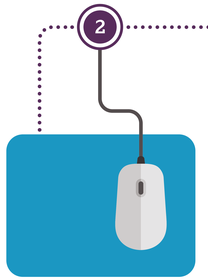
The journey of cancer medicine

1 Diagnosis and treatment plan

After your cancer diagnosis your consultant will develop a treatment plan with you. You will have your height and weight taken prior to confirming your treatment plan to ensure the accuracy of the prescription.

This discussion will take place over one or two appointments, usually over a period of one to two weeks.

Clinical trials
In the event that your treatment plan is a clinical trial, you will have further appointments to give your consent and have relevant tests to ensure it is safe for you to enter the trial.



2 Prescription ordered

Your consultant will prescribe your medicines using the hospital's online prescribing system. A safety check of all prescriptions must take place by specially trained pharmacists.

Prescribing and screening (safety checks) should take place a minimum of five working days in advance.

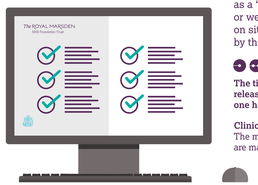
Clinical trials
All the results from your screening visit are sent off to the sponsoring company (anonymised). You will then be registered, given a unique trial identification number and your dosage/medicine will then be assigned to you.

3 Prescription received

Your prescription is sent to the pharmacy where your medicines are prepared. All medicines are individually prepared following the instructions from the prescribing clinician.

This takes at least two hours.

Clinical trials
Pharmacy receives a copy of the registration with the drug and dose assigned. A specific batch of drug will be assigned to you using an online system.

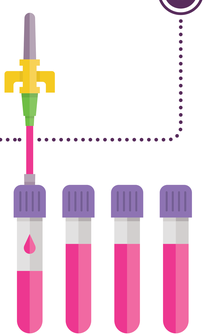


4 Prescription processed

Injectable medicines will either be ordered from outside the hospital as a 'ready-to-administer' medicine or we will schedule it to be prepared on site in a specialist clean room by the pharmacy aseptic team.

The time frame for dispensing and releasing bought in products is within one hour if requested at short notice.

Clinical trials
The majority of clinical trial drugs are made on the day.



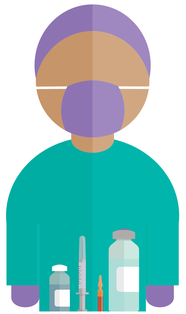
5 Patient assessment

When you come to the hospital, you will have a blood sample taken and then be seen by a healthcare professional to assess if you are well enough to receive your treatment. Your cancer medicine cannot be released by Pharmacy until the healthcare professional has confirmed that you are fit to proceed with treatment.

Your appointment with a healthcare professional will be approximately one to two hours after your bloods are taken.

If you are on a one-stop pathway and your prescription is adjusted following your assessment this will mean that your treatment may be delayed while the necessary safety checks and changes are made.

Clinical trials
Some trials do not support the two-stop process and can only be done as a one-stop.



6 Product preparation

Medicines prepared on site each have a worksheet. The raw materials used are assembled and passed into a sterile room, where they are mixed together in a medical safety cabinet or isolator by a skilled operator.

In house products (non-trial) have a two hour turnaround period from confirmation to release. They should be ready to use within two hours from confirmation.

If confirmation is received before 4pm the day before treatment, it should be ready and waiting on the unit when you arrive for your treatment appointment.

Clinical trials
Clinical trial medicines need further stringent checks against a trial protocol.

7 Treatment ready for final checks

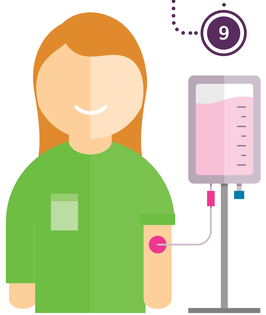
The final medicine is labelled and passed to a releasing officer for inspection. These checks are legal mandatory requirements. The aseptic unit notifies the relevant day care unit that the treatment is ready for collection.

If you are on a one-stop pathway this will be on the same day as your blood test and consultation with a healthcare professional.

If you are on a two-stop pathway this step will be on the same day as your appointment for treatment.

8 Treatment delivered

The treatment is collected in a padded yellow transport bag by a member of staff and is delivered to the treatment area where you will receive your treatment.



9 Treatment administered

Anti-cancer medicines are administered to patients in a number of different ways. A nurse will always do a final assessment prior to starting your treatment.

The length of your treatment depends on the drug and whether it is the start of the treatment cycle.

Clinical trials
Prior to starting your treatment there will be assessment/samples which need to be obtained before, during and after treatment. You may need to stay for an extended period for observations to ensure there are no side effects.

10 Medicines to take home

In most cases, during or after receiving your cancer medicine, a member of the pharmacy or nursing team will give you some supportive medicines to take home. They will explain how to take each medicine. Please ask them any questions you have about your treatment.

Medicines will be released from pharmacy once confirmed, provided there are no changes. Sometimes you may have to wait if changes are required.

Clinical trials
If your drug is a tablet/capsule/liquid, a pharmacist or research nurse will explain the process of how and when it should be taken. Some trials require the completion of a diary card to record when medicines have been taken.

Treatment pathways

There are two different pathways for treatment – one-stop and two-stop:

One-stop pathway
Patients have their blood test, clinic appointment and treatment on the same day. One-stop pathways are not available for all treatments.

Two-stop pathway
Patients have their blood test and clinic appointment on the same day, followed by treatment one to two days later.

NHS

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