



**BC Cancer Agency**

## **For the Patient: GIIR**

Other Names: Palliative chemotherapy for metastatic colorectal cancer using Irinotecan

**GI** = GastroIntestinal

**IR** = Irinotecan

### **ABOUT THIS MEDICATION**

#### **What is this drug used for?**

- Irinotecan is a drug given to treat cancer of the colon or rectum. It is given directly into the vein, or intravenously (IV).

#### **How do these drugs work?**

- Irinotecan works by interfering with dividing cells and preventing an increase in the number of cancer cells.

### **INTENDED BENEFITS**

- This therapy is being given to destroy and/or limit the growth of cancer cells in your body. This treatment may improve your current symptoms, and delay the onset of new symptoms.
- It may take at least two treatments before your doctor can judge whether or not this treatment is helping.

### **TREATMENT SUMMARY**

#### **How are these drugs given?**

- You will receive one intravenous (IV) chemotherapy drug called Irinotecan. It will be given to you at the clinic by a chemotherapy nurse. Each treatment will take **about 2 hours**. Your first treatment will probably take longer, as the nurse will review information on the chemotherapy drug with you.
- The treatment is repeated every 3 weeks. This 3 week or 21-day period of time is called a "cycle". The cycle is usually repeated up to a maximum of 6 cycles, but may be changed depending on how the chemotherapy affects you.

**The calendar on the following page outlines your overall treatment plan.**

C Y C L E  1	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

C Y C L E  2	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

C Y C L E  3	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

C Y C L E  4	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

C Y C L E  5	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

C Y C L E  6	DATE	TREATMENT PLAN
		▶ Week 1 → Irinotecan IV x 1 day
		Week 2 → No Treatment
		Week 3 → No Treatment

## What will happen when I get my drugs?

- A blood test is done each cycle, on or before the first day of each treatment cycle. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on your blood counts and/or other side effects.

## Side Effects

- The doctor will review the risks of treatment and possible side effects with you before starting treatment.
- The chemotherapy nurse will review possible side effects and their management with you on the day you receive your first treatment.
- **Early onset diarrhea** may occur during or shortly after an irinotecan treatment (within 24 hours). It starts with watery eyes, stomach cramps and sweating, and requires treatment as soon as possible. Tell your nurse or doctor **immediately** if you experience these symptoms. Early onset diarrhea is treated with a medication called atropine, which is injected into a vein or under your skin. If the cancer centre is closed, your cancer doctor may tell you to go to the Hospital Emergency for atropine treatment.
- **Late onset diarrhea** may occur one day to several days after an irinotecan treatment. It starts with stools more loose or often than usual and requires early treatment. It is very important that you purchase LOPERAMIDE (IMODIUM®) 2 mg tablets from a retail pharmacy. A prescription is not required. The dosing of loperamide for diarrhea caused by irinotecan is much higher than the package directions. It is important that you follow this dosing schedule:
  - Late onset diarrhea must be treated immediately with loperamide 2mg tablets
  - **Take two (2) tablets** at the first sign of loose or more frequent stools than usual
  - Then **take one (1) tablet every two (2) hours** until diarrhea has stopped for 12 hrs.
  - At night, you may take **two (2) tablets every four (4) hours** (set your alarm) during the time you usually sleep.Always keep a supply of loperamide available to use (e.g. have 48 tablets on hand). If the diarrhea **does not improve 24 hours after starting loperamide or lasts more than 36 hours**, call your doctor.
- Unexpected and unlikely side effects can occur with any drug treatment. Please refer to the patient information handout titled "***For the Patient: irinotecan***" for a complete list of possible side effects and their management.

## Medication Interactions

Other drugs such as laxatives, diuretics (e.g. hydrochlorothiazide, furosemide), seizure medicines, St. John's Wort, dexamethasone or prochlorperazine may interact with irinotecan.

- Dexamethasone can be taken as an anti-nausea drug. Discuss with your cancer doctor if you are taking dexamethasone on a daily basis.
- Prochlorperazine should not be taken as an anti-nausea drug on the day of your irinotecan treatment.
- Tell your doctor if you are taking any other drugs as your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs. Please refer to "***For the Patient: irinotecan***".

**If you experience symptoms or changes in your body that have not been described in “*For the Patient: irinotecan*” but worry you, or if any symptoms are severe, contact:**

\_\_\_\_\_ at telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_