



## For the Patient: BRAVGEM

Other names: **GEM** Gemcitabine(Gemzar ®)

### BC Cancer Agency

#### Uses:

- BRAVGEM is an intravenous drug treatment given as therapy for metastatic breast cancer, in the hope of destroying breast cancer cells that have spread to other parts of your body. This treatment may improve your overall survival and help reduce your symptoms.

#### Treatment Plan:

- Your treatment plan consists of about 6 chemotherapy cycles (about 6 months). A cycle length is 4 weeks. Gemcitabine is given intravenously once weekly for 3 weeks, followed by a 1 week rest (=4 weeks). Each treatment will take about 45 minutes.
- For each cycle, you will need to have a blood test before intravenous treatment, and see your oncologist before the cycle. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on your blood counts and/or other side effects.
- Nausea is not common. However, your doctor may choose to give you a medication before and possibly after chemotherapy, if nausea is a problem for you.

#### Instructions:

- If you need an anti-nausea drug, bring your pills with you to take before each treatment.
- Other drugs such as warfarin (COUMADIN®) may interact with BRAVGEM. Tell your doctor if you are taking this or other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- You may drink small amounts of alcohol, as it will not affect the safety or usefulness of your treatment.
- Tell other doctors or dentists that you are being treated with BRAVGEM before you receive any treatment from them.
- If you are still having menstrual periods, BRAVGEM may cause your ovaries to stop working, resulting in menopausal symptoms (such as hot flashes) and infertility. Your periods may stop. **This may be permanent**, especially if you are 40 years of age or older. Even if you have stopped having periods after treatment, if you were fertile prior to chemotherapy, you may be able to conceive a pregnancy. Use birth control (but **not** birth control pills) if you could become pregnant, even if you have stopped menstruating because of chemotherapy. Do not breast feed during treatment. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about fertility and birth control after treatment.

### Serious Risks of Treatment:

Unexpected and unlikely side effects can occur with any drug treatment. The ones listed below are particularly relevant to your treatment plan:

#### During treatment:

- **Infection:** The number of white blood cells that help fight infection will be lowered by the chemotherapy drug, usually starting after about day 7 of each cycle. Your blood count will be checked prior to each chemotherapy treatment, and the start of each new cycle of treatment. If your white blood cell count becomes very low you could get a serious infection. **If you have a fever over 38°C or 100°F, call your cancer doctor immediately (24 hours a day) or go immediately to your nearest Hospital Emergency and tell the doctor you are on chemotherapy.**
- **Increased risk of bleeding:** The number of platelets (special blood cells that help your blood to clot normally after injury) may be lowered by the treatment. They are expected to return to normal by day 1 of next cycle. When the platelet count is low you may be more likely to bruise or bleed. Notify your cancer doctor promptly if you develop large or numerous bruises, or unusual bleeding (eg. nosebleed that won't stop, blood in stool, urine, or sputum). Try to avoid using ASA or ibuprofen, if other pain medications could be used, as they may increase the risk of bleeding, but if you need to use one of these medications, let your doctor know. For patients receiving Warfarin, a modification of the dose may be required based on blood test results (increased INR due to possible interaction with chemotherapy).

#### Common chemotherapy side effects and management:

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment with gemcitabine and may last for 24 hours. It is usually mild to moderate.	You may be given a prescription for anti-nausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drink plenty of liquids.</li><li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li><li>• Try the ideas in <i>Food Choices to Control Nausea</i>.</li></ul>
A <b>flu-like illness</b> may occur shortly after your treatment. You may have fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint aches. Flu-like symptoms usually disappear on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take acetaminophen (eg, <b>TYLENOL®</b>) every 4 hours if needed.</li><li>• Fever and chills, which occur more than 48 hours after treatment, may be signs of an infection. They should be reported to the doctor immediately. See details below.</li></ul>
<b>Skin Rash</b> may occur after treatment with gemcitabine. It is usually mild and is found on the arms, legs, chest, back or stomach. It may or may not be itchy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply hydrocortisone cream 0.5% sparingly 3-4 times daily.</li></ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Sore mouth</b> may occur a few days after treatment and may last days or weeks. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth or in the throat. <b>Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste.</li> <li>• Make a mouthwash with ½ teaspoon baking soda or salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Sore Mouth during Chemotherapy</i>.*</li> <li>• Tell your doctor about a sore mouth as your chemotherapy doses may need to be decreased if your mouth sores are severe. Call your doctor if you are having difficulty eating or drinking.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea</b> may occur.</p>	<p>If diarrhea is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Diarrhea During Chemotherapy</i>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.</p>	<p>If swelling is a problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <i>Your Bank to Energy Savings: How People with Cancer Can Handle Fatigue</i>.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hair loss sometimes occurs</b> with gemcitabine. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with gemcitabine. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<p>If hair loss is a problem, refer to <i>For the Patient: Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy</i>.*</p>
<p><b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</li> </ul>

\*available through your nurse or nutritionist

\*\* available through your nurse

**If you experience symptoms or changes in your body that have not been described above but worry you, or if any symptoms are severe, contact**

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