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Routes of Administration

Parenteral cancer medications, including hormonal therapy, are administered by several routes including:

- Subcutaneous
- Intramuscular
- Intrathecal
- Intraperitoneal
- Intravesical
- Intravenous

Intravenous administration is the most frequently used route for parenteral chemotherapy delivery.

At the BC Cancer Agency, chemotherapy for parenteral administration is prepared and administered in a closed system using Closed System Drug Transfer Devices (CSDTDs) to minimize exposure to hazardous drugs.

Subcutaneous

Because of the ease of administration, patients may be taught to self administer medications subcutaneously. Limited volumes of fluid are tolerated subcutaneously; more than one injection site may be required for larger volumes. For example, the MYBORPRE PPO indicates that for doses greater than 2.5 mL use two syringes and two separate sites.

Intramuscular

The onset of action is faster with intramuscular administration than subcutaneous administration. Limited volumes of fluid are tolerated; more than one injection site may be required for larger volumes. For example, the Asparaginase monograph recommends that dose volumes greater than 2 mL be administered in two injection sites if possible to reduce pain of injection, although a single site can be used if necessary.
Intrathecal

The intrathecal route is used to bypass the blood-brain barrier to deliver drugs to the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). Some protocols include medications for both intrathecal and intravenous administration. Some drugs that can be safely administered intravenously are not safe to administer intrathecally.

For example, vinca alkaloids are safely given intravenously, but can be fatal if administered by intrathecal injection. There have been several cases worldwide where VinCRIStine was inadvertently given intrathecally. VinCRIStine is now dispensed in 50 mL minibags so that it is easier to distinguish from the intrathecal drugs which are supplied in syringes. All vinca alkaloids require an auxiliary label with the words “Warning: For Intravenous Use Only – Fatal If Given By Other Routes” as outlined in V-40 Labeling of Vinca Alkaloid Preparations [Systemic Therapy - Policies & Procedures]. The additional precautions required when administering cytotoxic drugs by the intrathecal route are described in III-50 Hazardous Drugs Intrathecal Administration [Systemic Therapy - Policies & Procedures].

Intraperitoneal

The intraperitoneal route is used to deliver medications directly into the abdominal cavity through a catheter surgically placed in the abdominal wall. Medications are supplied in infusion bags. Higher concentrations of medications are delivered locally to the abdominal cavity while minimizing exposure to the rest of the body. The medication may be drained out after a few hours or left inside where it is gradually absorbed. The GOOVIPPC Protocol Summary is an example of an ovarian cancer treatment that includes intravenous and intraperitoneal PACLitaxel and intraperitoneal CARBOplatin. The medication is not drained from the abdominal cavity after administration.

Intravesicular

Intravesicular medications are administered through a urinary catheter into the bladder in order to deliver higher concentrations of medications to the bladder while minimizing exposure to the rest of the body. Medications are supplied in syringes. After administration, they are held in the bladder for a period of time as outlined in the BC Cancer Agency Protocol Summary and then drained. An example of intravesicular administration is BCG for bladder cancer in the GUBCG Protocol Summary.
Intravenous

Intravenous administration provides a faster onset of action than intramuscular administration. Larger volumes of fluids are tolerated with intravenous administration compared with intramuscular or subcutaneous administration. Vesicant or irritant drugs that may cause tissue damage when administered intramuscularly or subcutaneously can be administered intravenously.

Chemotherapy for intravenous administration may be prepared in:

- Syringes for IV push injection
- IV bags for intermittent or continuous infusion
- Infusion devices for continuous infusion

The pharmacist should be aware of the intravenous route chosen so that chemotherapy can be prepared appropriately for the method of administration. For example, fluorouracil may be prepared in a syringe, IV bag, or infusor.

Vesicants

Many cancer chemotherapy agents have the potential to cause tissue necrosis if extravasation (infiltration into tissue around the vasculature) occurs. These drugs are known as vesicants. Vesicants may cause blistering, local or extensive tissue necrosis, ulceration and progressive sloughing of damaged tissue. This may occur over several weeks and require surgical excision and skin grafting. To avoid this complication the nurse carefully selects the IV administration site for each patient.

If extravasation of a vesicant does occur, it is imperative that treatment be started immediately. An extravasation kit should be readily available in every area where chemotherapy is administered. The contents of the kit, procedures for preparing and administering a vesicant drug and the management of extravasation, are detailed in *Ill-20 Chemotherapy Extravasation* [Systemic Therapy - Policies & Procedures].

Venous Access

Administration via the intravenous route can be achieved using a peripheral site; however, a central venous access device (CVAD) is preferred in specific circumstances including:
• Chemotherapy treatments with vesicants or irritants
• Frequent treatments or long-term therapy that may cause damage to veins from frequent needle access
• Chemotherapy given by continuous infusion
• Poor peripheral venous access (e.g., presence of edema or previous phlebitis)

Another term for CVAD is central venous catheter (CVC).

### Central Venous Access Devices (CVADs)

There are a variety of CVADs available and depending on the needs, may be inserted for short-term or long-term therapy. CVADs may have a single or multiple lumens. Each lumen is treated as a separate catheter. Incompatible medications can be infused simultaneously via separate lumens.

The following chart summarizes some important features of CVADs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venous Access</th>
<th>Duration of Use</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tunneled Central Venous Catheter</strong> [e.g., Hickman®, Broviac®]</td>
<td>Inserted into the subclavian vein, Tip rests in superior vena cava, Tunneled subcutaneously to exit site on chest</td>
<td>Long-term (months to years)</td>
<td>Can be left in place indefinitely, All therapies can be administered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)</strong></td>
<td>Inserted into a large vein just above or below the antecubital fossa, Tip rests in the superior vena cava</td>
<td>Mid to Long-term (several days to months)</td>
<td>All therapies can be administered, Easily removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implanted Venous Access Device (IVAD)</strong> [e.g., Port-A-Cath®, BARD]</td>
<td>Inserted into the subclavian vein, Tip rests in superior vena cava</td>
<td>Long-term (months to years)</td>
<td>Can be permanent, All therapies can be administered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peripheral Administration

Peripheral administration of vesicants and other drugs by IV push is given through the lowest medication port (sidearm) of a primary IV line flowing freely by gravity. Vesicant drugs that are given as a peripheral infusion (e.g., vinCRIStine) are administered by gravity through the secondary medication port of a free-flowing IV.

Vesicant drugs when given peripherally must never be administered by infusion pump because the pump may continue to deliver the vesicant drug after extravasation occurs. The peripheral administration site is observed closely for evidence of extravasation and is checked for blood return every 2-3 mL for IV push and 1-2 minutes for IV infusions.

Central Administration

At the BC Cancer Agency both vesicant and non-vesicant chemotherapy given through a central venous access device (CVAD) may be administered by:

- IV push through the lowest medication port (sidearm) of a free-flowing IV
- Intermittent infusion using an infusion pump

The infusion pumps used at the BC Cancer Agency are equipped with drug error reduction software (DERS) to minimize pump programming errors. The software provides a warning when dose, rate or concentration information is entered outside of the safe range for each medication in the drug library.

Continuous Infusions

Some protocols require non-vesicant drugs to be delivered continuously, over an

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**Power Port®**

- **Port implanted into subcutaneous tissue usually in the upper chest**
- **Internal device**
- **Decreased risk of infection**
- **Unrestricted activity**
extended period of time. This can be accomplished using infusion devices. These devices provide flexibility to patients, allowing them to be ambulatory while receiving medication by a continuous, regulated infusion. They are generally small and inconspicuous, in order to minimize any impact on patients’ daily living activities. An infusion device would be used in the GIFOLFIRI protocol, for example, in which fluorouracil (5-FU) is given intravenously by continuous infusion over 46 hours. There are a variety of devices that can be used for this purpose. Some brands of infusion devices used by the BC Cancer Agency are listed below:

- Baxter Infusor® — disposable elastomeric device
- Abbott AIM® (Ambulatory Infusion Manager) pump — electronic device
- CADD® (Computerized Ambulatory Drug Delivery) pump — electronic device

The BC Cancer Agency uses Baxter Infusors® for all continuous infusions of 5-FU. The Infusors® have elastomeric balloons that provide fixed infusion rates, so infusion rate programming is not required. This is one of the Institute for Safe Medication Practice (ISMP) recommendations to prevent pump infusion rate errors resulting from incorrect pump programming.

Please see *Elastomeric Infusors* [Chemotherapy Administration FAQs] for more information about Baxter Infusors®, including checklists for rate error prevention, identifying the causes of rate errors and dose banding.

**Stability and Compatibility**

It is the responsibility of the pharmacist to determine the stability and compatibility of the chemotherapy drug prior to preparing the product for parenteral administration.

The stability of the drug being administered — specifically, the chemical stability of the chemotherapy agent — can be affected by the following factors:

- The original state of the drug: Does it need to be reconstituted?
- The diluent in which the final product will be prepared: What solution is indicated in the protocol for an infusion?
- Storage conditions: Is refrigeration required?
- The final concentration of the product: For example, the stability of etoposide decreases as the concentration increases.
To determine the stability and compatibility of a chemotherapy drug in a given diluent or vehicle, the pharmacist can follow the recommendations in a variety of sources. The references used by the BC Cancer Agency include:

- Chemotherapy Preparation and Stability Chart
- Drug monographs from the manufacturer
- *Handbook on Injectable Drugs* by Lawrence A. Trissel
- *American Hospital Formulary Service (AHFS) Drug Information*
- *USP DI — Drug Information for the Health Care Professional*
- Information from clinical trials
- Primary literature search

**Y-Site Compatibility**

Chemotherapy drugs are not usually administered concurrently by a Y-site connector, even if they are considered compatible in the references above. An exception is that leucovorin is administered concurrently with either oxaliplatin or irinotecan in some Gastrointestinal protocols.

**Non-DEHP Equipment**

Di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP) is a chemical additive found in most polyvinyl chloride (PVC) medical equipment such as intravenous bags, tubing, and administrations sets. DEHP is used to make PVC soft and flexible. Some drug solutions cause leaching of DEHP from PVC equipment into the intravenous solution. These drugs must be prepared and administered with non-DEHP equipment. It is not known what level of DEHP is ‘dangerous’ to humans; however, DEHP is hepatotoxic and exposure should be minimized.

There is a growing list of cytotoxic drugs that should not be used with DEHP equipment. The *Chemotherapy Preparation and Stability Chart* [Cancer Drug Manual] currently recommends non-DEHP infusion bags and tubing for cabazitaxel, DOCEtaxel, etoposide, ixabepilone, PACLitaxel, temsirolimus, and teniposide. BC Cancer Agency protocols and preprinted orders also indicate when non-DEHP bags and tubing are to be used for drug administration. The terms “non-PVC” and “non-DEHP” were once used interchangeably, but they are now known to be different.