



Provincial Health Services Authority

## For the Patient: GIPAJGEM

Other Names: Adjuvant chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer using Gemcitabine

**GI** = GastroIntestinal

**P** = Pancreatic

**AJ** = Adjuvant

**GEM** = Gemcitabine

### **ABOUT THIS MEDICATION**

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

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

#### **How does this drug work?**

- Gemcitabine 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 prevent a recurrence of cancer, improve your current symptoms, and delay the onset of new symptoms.
- “Adjuvant” therapy means this treatment is being given in addition to other types of treatment, such as surgery.

### **TREATMENT SUMMARY**

#### **How is this drug given?**

- You will receive one intravenous (IV) chemotherapy drug called gemcitabine. It will be given to you at the clinic by a chemotherapy nurse. Each treatment will take **about 1 hour**. Your first treatment will probably take longer, as the nurse will review information on the chemotherapy drug with you.
- The treatment is repeated every week for 3 weeks in a row, with a 1 week rest period. This 4 week or 28 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 → Gemcitabine IV x 1 day
		▶ Week 2 → Gemcitabine IV x 1 day
		▶ Week 3 → Gemcitabine IV x 1 day
		Week 4 → No Treatment

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

Treatment is continued for a total of 6 cycles, as long as you are benefitting from treatment and not having too many side effects.

### What will happen when I get my drugs?

- A blood test is done each week for the first 3 weeks of the cycle, on or before the first day of each treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on your blood counts and/or other side effects.

### SIDE EFFECTS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Unexpected and unlikely side effects can occur with any drug treatment. The ones listed below are particularly important for you to be aware of as they are directly related to the common actions of the drug in your treatment plan.

You doctor will review the risks of treatment and possible side effects with you before starting treatment. The chemotherapy nurse will review possible side effects of the drug and how to manage those side effects with you on the day you receive your first treatment.

SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS DURING TREATMENT	MANAGEMENT
<b>Nausea and vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment and may last for 24 hours. It is usually mild to moderate.	<p>You may be given a prescription for an anti-nausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. <b>It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred</b>, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in the <b><i>Practical Tips to Help Manage Nausea*</i></b></li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS DURING TREATMENT</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MANAGEMENT</b></p>
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b>) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</li> <li>• Fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than 48 hours after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your doctor <b>immediately</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Diarrhea</b> may sometimes 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> </ul> <p>Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <b><i>Food Ideas to Help Manage Diarrhea*</i></b></p>
<p>Your <b>white blood cells</b> may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, <b>you are at greater risk of having an infection.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom.</li> <li>• Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li> <li>• Take care of your skin and mouth.</li> <li>• Call your doctor <b>immediately</b> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.</li> </ul>
<p>Your <b>platelets</b> may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. <b>You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</b></p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself.</li> <li>• Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose.</li> <li>• Avoid constipation.</li> <li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene.</li> </ul> <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., <b>ASPIRIN®</b>) or ibuprofen (e.g., <b>ADVIL®</b>) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li> </ul> <p>For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., <b>TYLENOL®</b>) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable</p>

OTHER SIDE EFFECTS DURING TREATMENT	MANAGEMENT
<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>
<b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.	If swelling is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may commonly occur.	<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 <a href="#">the handout titled <i>Fatigue/Tiredness</i></a>*</li> </ul>
<b>Hair loss</b> sometimes occurs with gemcitabine. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with gemcitabine. Colour and texture may change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush.</li> <li>• Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes and perms.</li> <li>• If hair loss is a problem, refer to <a href="#">Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes</a>*</li> </ul>
<b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.	<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>

\*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse, pharmacist or dietitian for a copy.

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PATIENT**

- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to gemcitabine before treatment begins.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of gemcitabine.
- Gemcitabine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with gemcitabine. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with gemcitabine before you receive any treatment from them.

### **Medication Interactions**

Other drugs such as warfarin (COUMADIN®) may **interact** with gemcitabine. 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.

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS VERY IMPORTANT**

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heartbeat, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Signs of **heart problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat.

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs, numbness or tingling in feet or hands, blood in urine or cloudy urine.

**CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:**

- Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, constipation or diarrhea.
- Easy bruising or bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores where the needle was placed.
- Redness, swelling, pain or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth or throat.
- Skin rash with or without itching.
- Excessive drowsiness.
- Aches and pains.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_