

# Home chemotherapy service from University College Hospital Galway

A win-win situation for ambulant cancer patients developed when someone asked “How can we improve patient care?”

## Multiple myeloma

Multiple myeloma is the second most prevalent blood cancer with a high incidence in the elderly population. Although it is incurable, novel agents have emerged over the last five years leading to a significant improvement in patient outcomes, including survival. Due to strong clinical data there has been an increase in the use of bortezomib (Velcade) in University College Hospital Galway.

## Bortezomib and home administration

The recommended dose of bortezomib is 1.3 mg/m<sup>2</sup> body surface area twice weekly for two weeks (days 1, 4, 8 and 11). A 10-day rest period completes the 3-week treatment cycle. Once reconstituted, bortezomib has an 8-hour shelf life. The reconstituted solution is administered as a 3–5 second bolus intravenous injection requiring no special handling precautions.

Patients being treated with bortezomib can spend up to six hours in the hospital, waiting for blood testing, review by an attending doctor, dispensing and administration of the medicine. Many patients are elderly, travel long distances and need family support. To alleviate these burdens, a haematologist approached Janssen-Cilag to explore alternative possibilities for administration of bortezomib. Janssen-Cilag sourced a service provider, TCP Homecare and collectively we piloted a service. The result was ‘Velcade at Home’, an IV chemotherapy administration service for patients with multiple myeloma. Support and input was needed from all hospital personnel in order to establish a safe, effective and viable home administration service for bortezomib, which included the pharmacy department reconstituting the Velcade prior to its collection by the homecare nurse.

## Evaluation of the service

The pilot commenced in December 2008

and in total 17 patients have completed over 250 home chemotherapy administrations. No problems or significant complications of therapy have been encountered. Although two patients were withdrawn from the programme, this decision was unrelated to the efficacy or toxicity profile of bortezomib. Feedback from patients reveals that they are very satisfied and find the service convenient with minimum negative impact on quality of life. It has also contributed to easing the burden on the day ward, nursing and medical staff whilst optimising the time and resources the pharmacy team spend on bortezomib.

Following the success of the 7-month pilot phase, hospital management and the multidisciplinary team involved in supporting the service felt that it was of benefit both to the patients and the hospital to officially establish the service. Janssen-Cilag continues to support the service and TCP Homecare remains the service provider. A team from the Economics Department at the National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland, is compiling a pharmacoeconomic report on the service provided over the last seven months.

## Positive patient feedback

To quote one patient: “I could be gone from half-nine until half-four or more... a trip is a day wasted, a day lost in my life.” The patient’s partner added: “Sometimes she wouldn’t sleep for two or three nights thinking about it”. The patient also commented: “When you’re at the hospital, you hear what the doctors and nurses are saying but it doesn’t always sink in. At home, you can listen to what you’re being told”. She is now more confident and her partner added: “... Sometimes the tension grows in the person who’s being treated... you don’t see that when she’s being treated at home”.

## Conclusion

Home administration of bortezomib enables patients with difficulties in getting to the hospital to receive bortezomib. It helps to optimise workflow in pharmacy and eases the burden on the day ward medical and nursing staff. The collaborative effort by hospital personnel, TCP Homecare and Janssen-Cilag in developing and delivering this service was centred on the common goal of improving patients’ quality of life without compromising their care.

## Acknowledgements

University College Hospital Galway (UCHG) is a major academic teaching hospital serving an urban and widely dispersed rural population. The UCHG mission is to provide high quality and equitable care for all patients, in a safe and secure environment and to achieve excellence in clinical practice, teaching, training and research.

Janssen-Cilag develops and markets innovative, high-quality pharmaceutical products and services. Their mission is to put patients at the heart of everything and this is achieved through customer focus, personal and organisational leadership and process excellence.

TCP Homecare are recognised innovators in the field of home/community therapy in Ireland, delivering home and community-based nursing services to the highest professional standards.

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