



## LUNG CANCER

***This information sheet is for your general information and is not a substitute for medical advice. The specifics of your condition and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.***

Lung cancer is the most common form of cancer among both men and women. It has a strong link to cigarette smoking and, to a lesser degree, with exposure to asbestos. The incidence, however, seems to be rising in women and stabilising in men.

There are various categories of lung cancer. They are broadly categorised as small cell and non-small cell lung cancer. This distinction has implications for the natural development of cancer, the type of treatment indicated and the expected outcome.

Because the early symptoms of the condition are not necessarily specific to lung cancer, patients are often not diagnosed until later. Symptoms that should alert patients include coughing up blood, increasing shortness of breath, persistent cough or a change in the nature of a chronic cough, hoarseness and chest pain. General symptoms include weight loss and tiredness. Patients may also have secondary symptoms due to the spreading of the condition to other parts of the body.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of the condition, the following investigations are useful:

- chest X-ray;
- an examination of the inside of the lungs using a bronchoscope (bronchoscopy); cells can also be removed from suspicious areas in the lung by using a biopsy needle (called needle aspiration); sometimes more invasive procedures are necessary to obtain a definite diagnosis;
- computed tomography (CT) scan of the chest;
- ultrasound or CT scan of the upper abdomen;
- radioisotope scans; and
- blood tests.

Your doctor may require further investigation depending on your symptoms at the time of the tests.

### **Treatment options**

Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the condition, as well as on your general state of health.

#### *Non-small cell cancer*

Treatment options include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and various combinations of these treatment methods in various sequences. The choice of therapy will be determined by the stage of the condition, co-existing medical disorders (e.g. emphysema, diabetes or heart problems) and general well being. The form of treatment will be chosen in consultation with the patient.

#### *Small cell lung cancer*

Chemotherapy plays a crucial role in the treatment of small cell lung cancer. Often the treatment options mentioned above may be used in addition, depending on the stage of the condition, the patient's general condition and his or her preference.

### **References**

GVI Oncology (South Africa)