

Information for patients and families about STEROIDS

You have been prescribed, or had administered during your chemotherapy treatment, *dexamethasone* or *prednisolone*.

These are part of the corticosteroid family, called glucocorticoids.

They assist the chemotherapy drugs in killing your cancer cells and moderate or lessen the side-effects of the chemotherapy drugs. As such, they are an important part of your treatment.

In addition to some physical side-effects (eg increased appetite, weight and skin changes), steroids can affect your mood, thinking, clarity of mind, mental energy and behavior. Together these side-effects are called “neuropsychiatric side-effects”.

MOST people experience some wakefulness and a buzzing mind, perhaps with increased energy; **SOME** experience anxiety or irritability. More severe symptoms occur in about 6% of patients and can alter the way you see and respond to the world. Your family may become more aware of changes than you, so listen to any observations they make.

It is important that you report even mild disturbances to your nurse and doctor. A small dose of medication can help to counteract these effects; sleeplessness and mental exhaustion make dealing with the chemotherapy drugs difficult.

If you or your family become aware of unusual behaviors or ‘weird’ experiences, you should contact your doctor straight away. A specialist with experience in managing the side-effects of steroids will be able to assess your symptoms and provide appropriate treatment to settle them.

On the days off steroids you may experience a flatness of mood, even depression. This will pass, but can feel very unpleasant.

Any unusual experiences you have are no fault of yours – it is not possible to predict WHO will react in this way to steroids.

Any changes you experience are temporary. The best management is recognition of the side-effects and early intervention when they are a problem.