ADVANCED PROSTATE CANCER TREATMENT
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About this booklet

This booklet may be useful for men who are starting or having treatment for Advanced Prostate Cancer. Advanced Prostate Cancer refers to prostate cancer which has started to spread beyond the prostate gland (locally advanced) and may be affecting surrounding structures or has reached other organs (metastatic).

After diagnosis, it helps to know what to expect and where you can get further support.

This booklet includes information about the treatment options for Advanced Prostate Cancer according to your diagnosis, and other relevant information you may find useful in your cancer journey. Every patient may require different treatment options and not all information in this booklet may be applicable to your needs. The information in this booklet focuses on Advanced Prostate Cancer treatments.

This booklet does not replace the information provided by healthcare professionals who will be guiding you throughout your care.
Your first oncology consultation

Following your referral to Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre, health care professionals will contact you for an appointment with your Oncologist (the specialised doctor who will be managing your cancer treatment). Your Oncologist will discuss with you your treatment options and together, you shall formulate a treatment plan. Based on the treatment decisions, you will encounter relevant healthcare professionals who will support you during your treatment plan and address your informational needs.

You might find it helpful if you write down any questions you may have prior to your oncology consultation.
Your feelings

Most people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have cancer and experience many different emotions. Partners, family members and friends often have similar feelings and may also need support and guidance to cope.

Often shock, disbelief, denial, fear and uncertainty, anger, blame and guilt are some of the immediate reactions when cancer is diagnosed. You may feel unable to express any emotion. You may also find that you can take in only a small amount of information or you need to be told the same information repeatedly.

If you are experiencing difficulties in coping with your feelings, you may wish to be referred to the Psychology Department at the Oncology Centre.

If you have concerns about coping with the practical aspects of life, such as family and work, you may wish to be referred to the Social Work Service at the Oncology Centre.
Treatments used for advanced prostate cancer include hormonal therapy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Often, a combination of treatments is used. Treatment depends on the stage of your cancer, your general health and personal choice.

The stage of the cancer describes its size, position and whether it has spread beyond where it started in the body. Knowing the extent of the cancer helps the doctors guide you on the most appropriate treatment.

Generally, prostate cancer is divided into four stages:

Stage 1 - The cancer is very small and confined to the prostate. It cannot be felt during a rectal examination. This involves the doctor placing a gloved finger into the back passage to feel for any lumps or swelling.

Stage 2 - The cancer can be felt as a hard lump during a rectal examination, but it is still within the prostate gland.
Stage 3 - The cancer has started to break through the outer capsule of the prostate gland and may be in the nearby tubes that transport semen.

Stage 4 - The cancer has spread beyond the prostate gland to nearby structures such as the bladder or back passage (rectum), or to more distant organs such as the bones or liver.

This booklet of advanced prostate cancer will basically deal with stage 3 and stage 4 tumours.

**Hormonal therapy**

Hormonal therapy is the initial treatment for men with advanced prostate cancer before or after radiotherapy.

Hormones control the growth and activity of normal cells. In order to grow, prostate cancer is fed through the hormone testosterone, which is produced by the testicles. Therefore, hormonal therapies are used to reduce the amount of testosterone in the body and shrink the prostate gland by reducing cancer growth and consequently reducing symptoms. These can be given as injections or tablets.
Hormonal treatment works well for most men with advanced prostate cancer, and the cancer can often be controlled for some time. Your doctor will check and assess frequently how well the cancer is responding to treatment. This will involve physical examination, measuring your PSA (prostate-specific antigen) level through a blood test as well as having a CT scan or bone scan done when required. According to your individual condition and treatment response, your doctor may also suggest you change to a different hormonal therapy drug or may suggest chemotherapy.

**Side effects of hormonal therapy**

**Impotence**
Unfortunately, most hormonal therapies usually cause erectile dysfunction (impotence) and loss of sexual desire (libido) for as long as the treatment is given. If the treatment is stopped, the problem may disappear but with long-term treatment, this problem will persist. It can help to talk to your partner and doctor about your fears and worries.

**Hormonal effects**
It is common for most men who have hormonal therapy to experience hot flushes and sweating.
These side effects will gradually stop following termination of treatment.

**Other effects**
Hormonal treatment can also make you put on weight and feel constantly tired, both physically and mentally. Some drugs (most commonly flutamide and bicalutamide) may also cause breast swelling and breast tenderness.

Different drugs have different side effects, so it is important to discuss the possible side-effects with your doctor before you start treatment. Your doctor will recommend the use of other drugs and other suitable treatment modalities.

**Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy is the use of anti-cancer (cytotoxic) drugs to destroy cancer cells. In advanced prostate cancer, it is used to treat cancer that is no longer being controlled by hormonal therapy or when your doctor will advise otherwise.
Chemotherapy aims to shrink and control the cancer and relieve symptoms, with the aim of prolonging a good quality of life. Chemotherapy drugs are usually given by injection into a vein (intravenously) as a drip. Intravenous chemotherapy is often given through a small tube (cannula) in your arm. Your healthcare professionals will guide you should you require a special device inserted under the skin (Port-a-Cath®) to facilitate access to your veins.

Chemotherapy into the vein is given as a series of cycles which are given over a number of hours. This may be followed by a gap of a number of weeks (depending on your personal treatment plan) in order to allow your body to recover from any side effects of treatment. Your doctor or nurse will explain how many cycles of treatment are planned for you and how you will be given your chemotherapy.

The most commonly used chemotherapy drug to treat prostate cancer is docetaxel. However, other drugs may be used or any other suitable treatment that your doctor recommends.

Aurora Support Service organises pre-chemotherapy classes for you and your carers. The
aim of these classes is to educate patients who need chemotherapy as part of their treatment. These sessions provide patients with the necessary information to understand and manage chemotherapy side effects. To attend one of these classes you can contact Aurora Support Service on 79000495 or aurora.meh-health@gov.mt.

**Side effects of chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy drugs can cause side effects, but many of these can be well controlled with medicines and will usually go away when your treatment is finished. Side effects of chemotherapy vary from one person to another and are dependent on your treatment regime. Your doctor or nurse will tell you more about what to expect. Always mention to the healthcare professionals any side effects you’re having as there are usually ways in which they can be controlled.

**Radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells, while causing as little harm as possible to normal cells. The treatment is given in the radiotherapy department as a series of short
daily sessions. Each treatment takes 10–15 minutes and they are usually given Monday–Friday with a rest at the weekend. The healthcare professionals will discuss the treatment with you and shall provide further information.

You may be offered radiotherapy if the cancer causes symptoms, such as pain in the prostate area, or if it has spread to other parts of the body such as the bones. In this situation, radiotherapy cannot get rid of all the cancer cells, but it can reduce symptoms. This is known as palliative radiotherapy. It can take 7–10 days for the radiotherapy to start reducing the pain, and may take up to six weeks before the full effect is felt.

**Side effects of Radiotherapy**

You may develop side effects over the course of your treatment. These usually disappear gradually over a few weeks or months after treatment finishes. The radiographer and other relevant healthcare professionals will discuss this with you so that you may know what to expect. Let them know about any side effects you have during or after treatment, as there are often things that can be done to help.
Coping with Advanced Prostate Cancer

Having treatment can be difficult for you and your family and it can take a while to physically and emotionally recover from it. Advanced prostate cancer or its treatment may leave you feeling tired.

After your treatment has finished, you will have regular check-ups usually involving physical examination, a PSA test and a CT scan or bone scan as required. Follow-up appointments are a good opportunity to talk about any concerns you may have. However, if you notice any new symptoms or are anxious about anything else between your appointments, consult with your family doctor (GP). Your GP will guide you accordingly.

Bone pain

Advanced prostate cancer may cause unpleasant symptoms such as bone pain. Radiotherapy can be given to the affected bone or area if prostate cancer has spread to the bones. It may be given as a single treatment, or may be divided into a series of
smaller treatments. Many men notice that the pain eases within a couple of days, while others may have to wait 3 or 4 weeks. Painkillers can still be prescribed in the meantime if necessary. Your doctor will advise you which type of painkillers are most suitable for your condition.

Drugs called bisphosphonates can also help relieve bone pain. Bisphosphonates such as Zoledronic Acid may be given every 4 – 6 weeks into a vein (intravenously) as it can help to strengthen bones and reduce the symptoms.

**Sexuality**

Prostate cancer, its treatments and side effects may affect your sex life. Try not to think that sex is never going to be important in your life again. There will often be a period of adjustment for you and your partner. You may feel insecure and worry whether or not your partner will still find you sexually attractive. Partners are often concerned about how to express their love physically and emotionally after treatment. It is ok to be sexually active during treatment but it is always best to discuss this with your doctor.
Diet

Your body needs extra nutrients and calories during and after treatment for cancer. It is important to try to keep eating well, even if you have not got much of an appetite. Try eating little and often.

Rest and activity

Both rest and activity are necessary for good health, and it is important to find the right balance between the two. Your body will tell you when you need to rest and it is important to do so. However, it is important not to stop doing things completely. When you feel like doing things, it is important not to do too much. Start by setting yourself small goals such as going for a short walk.

Should you feel weak, it may help to spend some time with the physiotherapist and occupational therapist. The physiotherapist can put together an exercise programme for you and work with you to build up your muscle strength and confidence. On the other hand, the occupational therapist can help you regain your confidence to be able to manage better at home and can offer you practical advice.
Work

If you are still working, you may need to take time off work. It can be hard to judge the best time to return to work and this is likely to depend on the type of work you do and how you are feeling. It can help to talk to your employer about the situation.

Reducing stress

There are lots of ways to reduce stress. You could try doing things you enjoy. Some people find it relaxing to pray or start a new hobby. You may find it helpful to write a journal.

How Hospice Malta can help you

Hospice Malta provides and promotes the highest standards of Palliative Care, free of charge to persons suffering from cancer, among other conditions whilst also supporting the family throughout the cancer journey. Services include: Home Care, Day Therapy, Hydrotherapy, Respite, Transport, Loan of Equipment, Hospital support, Children’s summer programme, Bereavement support.
## Important Telephone Numbers

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<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mater Dei Hospital</td>
<td>25450000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Paul Boffa Hospital</td>
<td>21224491</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre</td>
<td>25452200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oncology Outpatients at the Oncology Centre</td>
<td>25452410/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemotherapy Focal nurses</td>
<td>79000495/79000433</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy Focal nurses</td>
<td>79000443/79004378</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospice Malta</td>
<td>21440085</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Cancer Platform Freephone</td>
<td>80072388</td>
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Useful Resources

**TICC e-mail**
ticc.samoc@gov.mt

Sir Paul Boffa Hospital - A patient information booklet

**Sir Paul Boffa Hospital Website**

**Mater Dei Hospital Website**
www.materdeihospital.org.mt/

**Macmillan Website**
http://www.macmillan.org.uk/

**Hospice Malta Website**
www.hospicemalta.org

Thanks
This booklet has been written, revised and edited by the Tailored Information in Cancer Care working group at Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre. Thanks go to the Macmillan Cancer Support for allowing us to adapt this information to our local needs.

Disclaimer
We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate, but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. This booklet does not in any way replace the medical advice or discussion between yourself and the medical team.