Multiple Myeloma

Multiple myeloma is the most common cancer of bone. It is caused by the uncontrolled multiplication of a type of white blood cell in the marrow. This white blood cell is called a plasma cell. This means the bone marrow is overworking producing plasma cells. Soon these overproduced cells begin to take up room in the marrow that is needed by other cells. This means that there are soon not enough red or white blood cells or platelets. Not enough red cells mean that the person is anemic. There are not enough red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body. There are not enough white blood cells to fight disease. This causes the person with multiple myeloma to not feel well. There is also bone pain through much of the body.

SYMPTOMS OF MULTIPLE MYELOMA

- Anemia causes *fatigue* (tiredness) and weakness.
- Back pain is common. This is from *fractures* (break in bones) caused by damage to the bones of the back.
- Lack of white blood cells makes infection more likely.
- Bleeding is a common problem from lack of the cells (*platelets*). Platelets help blood clots form. This may show up as bleeding from any place. Commonly this shows up as bleeding from the nose or gums.
- *Fractures* (bone breaks) are more common anywhere. The back and ribs are the most commonly fractured areas.

DIAGNOSIS

This tumor is often suggested by blood tests. Often doing a bone marrow sample makes the *diagnosis* (learning what is wrong). This is a test performed by taking a small sample of bone with a small needle. This bone often comes from the *sternum* (breast bone). This sample is sent to a *pathologist* (a specialist in looking at tissue under a microscope). After looking at the sample under the microscope, the pathologist is able to make a diagnosis of the problem. X-rays may also show boney changes.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Often there is no specific treatment for multiple myeloma. Most of the treatment consists of adjustments in dietary and living activities.

Some of these changes include:

- Your dietitian or caregiver helping you with your dietary questions.
- Taking iron and vitamins as prescribed by your caregiver.
- Eating a well balanced diet.
- Staying active, but follow restrictions suggested by your caregiver. Avoiding heavy lifting (more than 10 pounds) and activities that cause increased pain.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Using back braces and a cane may help with some of the boney pain.

TREATMENT

- Occasionally, anti-cancer medications may be used with multiple myeloma. Your caregiver can discuss this with you.
- Medications can also be given to help with the bone pain.
- There is no cure for multiple myeloma. Lifestyle changes can add years of quality living.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You develop severe, uncontrolled boney pain.
- You or your family notices confusion, problems with decision-making or inability to stay awake.
- You notice increased urination or constipation.
- You notice problems holding your water or stool.
- You have numbness or loss of control of your *extremities* (arms/hands or legs/feet).

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