Chemotherapy

Many people are apprehensive about chemotherapy due to concerns over uncomfortable side effects. However, managements for side effects have come a long way. Many side effects once associated with chemotherapy can be prevented and/or controlled.

WHAT IS CHEMOTHERAPY?

Chemotherapy is the general term for any treatment involving the use of chemical agents. Chemotherapy can be given through a vein, most commonly through an implanted port* or PICC line.* It can also be delivered by mouth (*orally*) in the form of a pill. The main goal of chemotherapy is to kill cancer cells and stop them from growing. It can destroy and eliminate cancer cells where the cancer started (*primary tumor location*) and throughout the body, often far away from the original cancer. It is a treatment that not only targets the original cancer location, but also the entire body (*systemic treatment*) for full effect and results.

Chemotherapy works by destroying cancer cells. Unfortunately, it cannot tell the difference between a cancer cell and some healthy cells. This results in the death of noncancerous cells, such as hair and blood cells. Harm to healthy cells is what causes side effects. These cells usually repair themselves after chemotherapy.

Because some drugs work better together rather than alone, 2 or more drugs are often given at the same time. This is called combination chemotherapy.

Depending on the type of cancer and how advanced it is, chemotherapy can be used for different goals:

- Cure the cancer.
- Keep the cancer from spreading.
- Slow the cancer's growth.
- Kill cancer cells that may have spread to other parts of the body from the original tumor.
- Relieve symptoms caused by cancer.

You and your caregiver will decide what drug or combination of drugs you will get. Your caregiver will choose the doses, how the drugs will be given, how often, and how long you will get treatment. All of these decisions will depend on the type of cancer, where it is, how big it is, and how it is affecting your normal body functions and overall health.

*Implanted port - A device that is implanted under your skin so that medicines may be delivered directly into your blood system.

*PICC line (*peripherally inserted central catheter*) - A long, slender, flexible tube. This tube is often inserted into a vein, typically in the upper arm. The tip stops in the large central vein that leads to your heart.

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