

Osteosarcoma – the basics

Disclaimer: This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This information sheet will tell you in simple terms:

- What is an Osteosarcoma?
- Why did the Osteosarcoma happen?
- What problems does Osteosarcoma cause?
- How did we find the Osteosarcoma?
- How do we treat Osteosarcoma?

What is an Osteosarcoma?

An **Osteosarcoma** is a type of cancer - a lump of cells (tumour) which should not be there. Osteosarcoma is a cancer that starts from **bone cells**. The osteosarcoma can start in any bone in the body.

Why did the Osteosarcoma happen?

In most cases, we do not know why children get an Osteosarcoma. Rarely, the osteosarcoma may start in a bone that is an area of the body which had radiotherapy treatment. Some people with rare genetic diseases, including inherited retinoblastoma, have a higher risk of getting an osteosarcoma.

What problems do Osteosarcomas cause?

With a Osteosarcoma, the problems depend on where the cancer is. In most cases, the child complains of pain in a bone. Sometimes, there is a lump or swelling which can be seen or felt. The child may limp or have difficulty using their limbs. The Osteosarcoma cancer cells may spread to other areas of the body and cause problems there.

The osteosarcoma, that my child has, is located _____

How did we find the Osteosarcoma?

You or your doctor may have noticed a lump, or been concerned about pains that do not go away. Usually a scan or an X-ray shows that there is a lump which should not be there.

How do we treat Osteosarcoma?

The treatment of each person with an Osteosarcoma is different. In most cases, a **paediatric oncologist** (a doctor who treats children with cancer) will develop the best treatment for your child, together with other specialists. These may be:

- an **orthopaedic surgeon** (a surgeon who operates on bones)
- a **radiation oncologist** (a doctor who uses radiation therapy to treat cancer).

Your oncologist is: _____

Your orthopaedic surgeon is: _____

Your radiation oncologist is: _____

In the first days, many **scans** will be done to find exactly **where** the cancer is, usually a CAT scan and a MRI scan. Some nuclear medicine scans (bone scan, gallium scan) and some **blood tests** will also be done. These tests allow us to find exactly where the Osteosarcoma is, and whether it has spread to other areas in the body.

A small amount of **bone marrow** (the liquid part inside bones) will be tested for Osteosarcoma cells. Sometimes, the surgeon will perform a small operation (a **biopsy**) to take out a small piece of the Osteosarcoma so that the exact type of the cancer is known. This helps in planning the best treatment.

There are three main ways to treat Osteosarcoma cancers. These are:

- use of drugs which kill cancer cells (**chemotherapy**)
- removal of some or all of the lump with an **operation**
- use of radiation to kill the cancer cells (**radiotherapy**).

Depending on the type of tumour and where it is, some or all of these ways will be used to treat the cancer. Some tumours have spread and can not be removed with an operation alone. Some tumours are not suitable for radiotherapy.

Your specialists will talk to you about the best way to treat **your** child.

Any questions about this information may be directed to the Oncology Treatment Centre on 9845 2115 (8am-4pm) or Camperdown ward on 9845 1123. Further sheets are available from the Oncology staff or The Children's Hospital at Westmead's website at www.chw.edu.au. Updated **April 2003**.

the children's hospital at Westmead