



Provincial Health Services Authority

## For the Patient: GUTAXGEM

Palliative Therapy for Germ Cell Cancers Using  
PACLitaxel and Gemcitabine

**GU = GenitoUrinary**

**TAX = paclitaxel**

**GEM = GEMcitabine**

### **ABOUT THIS MEDICATION**

#### **What are these drugs used for?**

- Paclitaxel (GEMZAR®) and Gemcitabine (TAXOL®, ONXOL®) are used together for palliative treatment of germ cell cancers (e.g. testicles in males and ovaries in females).

#### **How do these drugs work?**

- Paclitaxel and gemcitabine work together to limit the growth of cancer and may help reduce your symptoms.

### **TREATMENT SUMMARY**

#### **How are these drugs given?**

- Paclitaxel and gemcitabine are given into a vein (IV).
- You will receive both medications at the clinic on the first day of treatment (day 1) as well as on day 8 and 15. After 28 days from the first dose you will go back and start the “cycle” again. This will be repeated for 2-6 cycles.

#### **What will happen when I get my drugs?**

- A blood test will be taken before starting treatment and before each cycle. The blood test may also be repeated at anytime during treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on the results of the blood tests and/or other side effects.
- Prior to the paclitaxel dose you will be given other medications (dexamethasone, diphenhydramine, anti-nausea drugs) to help with side effects.

## SIDE EFFECTS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Your doctor will review the risks of treatment and possible side effects with you before starting treatment.

Side effects that can occur with these medications are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Nausea</b> and <b>vomiting</b> may occur after your treatment.</p>	<p>You will be given a prescription for anti-nausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. <b>It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred</b>, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li><li>• Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li></ul>
<p>Your <b>white blood cells</b> will decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, <b>you are at greater risk of having an infection</b>.</p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom.</li><li>• Take care of your skin and mouth.</li><li>• Avoid crowds and people who are sick.</li><li>• Call your doctor <b>immediately</b> at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.</li></ul>
<p>Your <b>platelets</b> may decrease 1-2 weeks after your treatment. They usually return to normal within 1 week. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. <b>You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual</b>.</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself.</li><li>• Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose.</li><li>• Avoid constipation.</li><li>• Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene.</li></ul> <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., <b>ASA for your heart</b>).</li><li>• For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.</li></ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Pain or tenderness</b> may occur where the needle was placed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</li> </ul>
<b>Diarrhea</b> may sometimes occur.	If diarrhea is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>Eat and drink often in small amounts.</li> <li>Avoid high fibre foods</li> </ul>
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may commonly occur.	Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired.
<b>Hair loss</b> is common and may begin within a few days or weeks of treatment. Your hair may thin or you may lose it completely. Your scalp may feel tender. Hair loss may occur on your face and body. Hair will grow back once your treatments are over and sometimes between treatments. Colour and texture may change.	Speak to your doctor if you notice this. You may also want to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply mineral oil to your scalp to reduce itching.</li> <li>If you lose your eyelashes and eyebrows, protect your eyes from dust and grit with a broad-rimmed hat and glasses.</li> </ul>
<b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet or lower legs may occur if your body retains extra fluid.	If swelling is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>

**Side effects for PACLITAXEL are listed in the table below:**

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Allergic reactions</b> commonly occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include flushing, rash, dizziness, breathing problems, abdominal or back pain. This can occur immediately or several hours after receiving paclitaxel and usually only with the first or second dose.	Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving paclitaxel or contact your oncologist <b>immediately</b> if this happens after you leave the clinic.
Paclitaxel <b>burns</b> if it leaks under the skin.	Tell your nurse or doctor <b>immediately</b> if you feel burning, stinging, or any other change while the drug is being given.
<b>Muscle or joint pain</b> may commonly occur a few days after your treatment.	You may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Fever</b> may sometimes occur shortly after treatment with paclitaxel. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.</li> <li>• Fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your doctor <i>immediately</i>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sore mouth</b> may sometimes occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. <b>Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste.</li> <li>• Make a mouthwash with ¼ teaspoon baking soda AND ¼ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day.</li> <li>• You can also request a prescription for Magic Mouthwash from your doctor.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Constipation</b> may sometimes occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise if you can.</li> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Numbness or tingling of the fingers or toes</b> may commonly occur. This will slowly return to normal once your treatments are over. This may take several months.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be careful when handling items that are sharp, hot, or cold.</li> <li>• Tell your doctor at your next visit, especially if you have trouble with buttons, writing, or picking up small objects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Skin rashes</b> may sometimes occur.</p>	<p>If itching is very irritating, call your doctor. Otherwise, be sure to mention it at your next visit.</p>
<p><b>Loss of appetite</b> may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase high calorie/protein fluids such as full-fat milk, homemade smoothies, nutritional supplements</li> <li>• Limit fluid intake prior to meals</li> <li>• Increase intake of high calorie foods</li> </ul>

**Side effects for GEMCITABINE are listed in the table below:**

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
A <b>flu-like illness</b> may occur shortly after your treatment. You may have fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint aches. Flu-like symptoms usually disappear on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take acetaminophen (eg, TYLENOL®) every 3-4 hours if needed.</li><li>• Fever and chills, which occur more than 48 hours after treatment, may be signs of an infection. They should be reported to the doctor immediately. See details below.</li></ul>
A <b>Skin Rash</b> may occur after treatment with gemcitabine. It is usually mild and is found on the arms, legs, chest, back or stomach. It may or may not be itchy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply hydrocortisone cream 0.5% sparingly 3-4 times daily.</li></ul>

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PATIENT:**

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, abdominal pain or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum); cloudy or foul smelling urine; painful, tender, or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin.
- Signs of a **blood clot** such as tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf swelling and tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, swelling of feet or lower legs, or fainting.
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**SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, swelling of feet or lower legs, numbness or tingling in feet or hands, blood in urine or cloudy urine.

**If you experience symptoms or changes in your body that have not been described above but worry you, or if any symptoms are severe, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at telephone number \_\_\_\_\_**