Head and neck cancer: The way ahead after treatment

Introduction
You have now completed the planned treatment for your head and neck cancer. This leaflet has been developed to help you understand what happens next, and where you can access help and support in the future should you need it.

How will I feel after my treatment is finished?
It may sound strange but you might feel somewhat lost after your treatment has finished as you have been used to the security of attending the hospital on a regular basis. The end of treatment can sometimes provoke strong emotions and possibly fears for the future. You may find it helpful to share your experiences with other patients who have had similar treatment. There is a head and neck support group (Head and Neck Dorset Support: HANDS) which meets every two months. If you would like to attend, please ask for further details from the head and neck nurses.

You may also feel tired and lethargic after your treatment. These are recognised late effects and can last for several months. It can often be very frustrating if you find that you are not able to manage to do your everyday activities as well as you used to. However, your energy levels will return, but may take longer than you had expected. Macmillan Cancer Support can provide you with some very useful information, available in leaflet form or via their website (see contact details at end of leaflet).

You may also experience other longer-term effects, such as a dry mouth. Please ask either your doctor or other members of the team for advice as there are certain products that may help. You may find it useful to carry a bottle of water with you at all times.

When do I come back to the hospital?
You should receive an outpatient appointment for four to six weeks after your treatment has finished. These appointments will continue for the first year, gradually becoming less frequent until five years after your diagnosis.

You may experience some anxiety before these appointments. This is not unusual. Most patients tell us that they find them reassuring and part of the recovery process. However we will try to ensure that your follow-up plan is tailored to meet your individual needs.

When you see your consultant he will do a thorough examination inside your mouth and on the outside of your neck. It may be necessary to look at the back of your throat and larynx using a nasendoscope. This is a small tube with a camera on the end that passes through your nose. It is a very quick procedure but if you are worried about how this will
What should I do if I have any concerns?
Fear about the cancer returning is the most common source of anxiety after treatment has finished, and knowing what signs and symptoms to look out for can help patients to cope with ongoing feelings of uncertainty. These will vary from person to person, so you may wish to ask your consultant for clarification of what to look out for. Alternatively the HYPERLINK "http://www.macmillan.org.uk" www.macmillan.org.uk website or their booklet on head and neck cancer can be a useful source of information.

Your GP will be aware of the treatment you have received and so will be your first point of contact. However, if you continue to worry about any possible adverse symptoms, the Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) can also advise you and liaise with your consultant.

When should I see my dentist?
You may have seen the consultant in restorative dentistry and oral rehabilitation to assess the condition of your teeth before and during your treatment. This may have included visits with the dental hygienist and advice from your own dentist for any routine treatment. Your long-term dental care requirements may be very different following the cancer treatment.

Your own dentist should receive a summary of your care and a long-term plan which takes into account any potential side effects of treatment (such as a dry mouth). It is important to attend your dentist and hygienist regularly and be reviewed by the consultant as recommended.

How can I reduce the risk of getting cancer again?
You may wish to consider some lifestyle changes following completion of your treatment. For example:

Limit your alcohol intake to no more than the recommended daily 3-4 units for men and 2-3 units for women, and try to have at least 2-3 alcohol-free days a week.
Stop smoking – quitting is not easy, but there is help and support available. It is never too late to quit.
Eat a balanced diet.
Maintain a healthy weight.
Keep active and take regular exercise.
Stay safe in the sun by using high factor sunscreen.

More information on living well after cancer is available on the NHS Choices website: HYPERLINK "http://www.nhs.uk" www.nhs.uk

What about returning to work?
Some people manage to keep working or return to work quicker than others. When you feel ready to work again, please ask advice from your consultant. It may be that returning part-time is an option to start with if your employer is in agreement. Advice on any work issues after a diagnosis of cancer is available on the Macmillan website ( HYPERLINK "http://www.macmillan.org.uk" www.macmillan.org.uk) or in booklet form.

What about financial concerns?
If you are worried about your finances, please contact either the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in Poole, Dorchester or Bournemouth, or contact our oncology social worker in
What about relationships?
The diagnosis and treatment for head and neck cancer are not only challenging for you as a patient, but also for those closest to you. When treatment is finished, it is not unusual for people to have difficulties re-establishing relationships again. Talking about your concerns with your family and friends may be all you need. However, speaking to someone else may also be helpful. The CNSs may be able to help and can signpost you to trained counsellors in the hospital, to an appropriate member of the HANDS support group or guide you to the Macmillan Cancer Support resources.

What do I want to achieve now my treatment is finished?
Recovery from head and neck cancer can be a slow process. Over time, side effects will lessen and become easier to manage. One way to reduce feelings that cancer has overtaken your life is to begin to take control again by setting yourself some achievable short-term and longer-term goals. You may find it helpful to consider what you want to achieve and write them down here:

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So how do I feel now?
This is your opportunity to tell us about your experiences after your treatment for head and neck cancer. You may wish to tell us about your recovery, any longer-term effects, or living life beyond cancer itself (survivorship). You can send your comments to the Head and Neck CNSs at Poole Hospital. Thank you.

Contact details
Clinical Nurse Specialists: Karen Roberts, Claire Clark
Tel: 01202 442365 or 01202 442071

Dietitian: Emma O’Gorman
Tel: 01202 442593

Speech and language therapists: Penny Scott, Sonya Liddiard,
Tel: 01202 442933

Poole Hospital Oncology Social Worker: Carol Baker
Tel: 01202 448740

Head and Neck Dorset Support Group (HANDS):
The group meets on the first Wednesday alternate months at Hamworthy Library from 5-7pm.
For more details please contact your CNS.
Tel: 01202 442365 or 442071
Tel: 0808 808 00 00 (free phone)
Supporting patients living with and beyond cancer

UK charity, patient support, advocacy and more

Let's Face It: HYPERLINK "http://www.lets-face-it.org.uk" www.lets-face-it.org.uk
Tel: 01843 833724
National support network

Tel: 0845 4500275
National charity for facial disfigurement

About Face: HYPERLINK "http://www.about-face.info" www.about-face.info
Tel: 01202 721021
Local head and neck cancer support charity

Macmillan Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
Poole/Bournemouth Tel: 01202 670716
Dorset Tel: 08454 900042
To help resolve legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice

Bournemouth and Poole NHS Stop Smoking Service: 0300 30 38 038
Dorset: 0800 00 76 653

Bournemouth and Poole Alcohol Brief Intervention Team: 01202 203101

We are always interested to receive feedback from our patients, in order to continually improve our service to patients. If you have any comments, please let the clinical nurse specialists know and they will ensure that they will be acted upon confidentially.

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an Information Prescription or contact:

**The Health Information Centre**
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
Poole
Dorset
BH15 2JB
We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice.