



Investigating your suspected cancer

**Having a malignancy of
unknown origin (MUO)**



Contents

- 3 What is MUO?**
- 4 What tests might you need?**
- 6 Getting your results**
- 6 Who can you talk to?**
- 7 Contact details**

What is MUO?

Malignancy of unknown origin (MUO) is when we suspect that you might have cancer but we are not certain. Our first task is to find out whether or not you have cancer.

Having a diagnosis of MUO can be a worrying time. You may feel that there is a lot of waiting and uncertainty. There may be tests that need completing before you know whether you have cancer or what type of cancer you have.

In most cases, it is clear where in the body the cancer has started. However, sometimes we find a cancer that has spread around the body without a clear starting point.

If it is possible to find out where your cancer started, your care will be handed over to a specialist team. For example, if we believe your cancer to have started in the lung, you will be treated by the lung cancer team.

If we can't find out where the cancer has started we will change your diagnosis to cancer of unknown primary (CUP) and you will be referred to a specialist in CUP.

What tests might you need?

You may need some or all of these tests, depending on what the MUO team thinks are the best to diagnose your condition.

Physical examination: This is where the doctor will examine you looking for anything unusual. It is normal for this to be a very thorough examination that may involve examining your skin and genitals. These are often areas where abnormalities can go unnoticed.

Blood tests: Tumour markers are specialist blood tests that relate to different types of cancers. We will also check your kidney and liver function.

CT scan: A computerised tomography (CT) scan takes a series of pictures of your body using x-rays. The pictures show cross-sections or slices of your body. They are put together by a computer and can be viewed on a screen. The scan shows a very detailed image of the inside of your body.

MRI scan: An MRI scan provides much more detailed pictures of your body than an ordinary x-ray. It is particularly good at identifying problems in the spine, the brain and the joints. It is also helpful for looking at other parts of the body, often when other types of scan have not given a full picture. Unlike x-rays and CT scans, MRI scans do not use radiation.

PET scan: PET-CT (positron emission tomography with computed tomography), is a safe and easy scanning method. It shows us how the tissues in the body are functioning and helps us to identify organs or tissues that are not working normally. With PET-CT, we inject a tracer (often a weak radioactive form of sugar) then scan the body.

Endoscopy: A camera on a thin flexible tube is inserted into your body. We can look directly at the upper end of the oesophagus (the tube that food passes down to reach the stomach); the stomach and around the first bend of the small intestine (duodenum).

Sometimes biopsies (small tissue samples) are taken from your body and sent for analysis. The biopsies taken are about the size of a match head and will not cause you any pain.

Colonoscopy: This is a flexible tube, about the thickness of a little finger, which has a camera and light at one end. It is passed through the anus (back passage) and carefully moved around the large bowel to look for abnormalities.

Biopsy: This allows us to get a sample of cells from the area of abnormality. You will be given specialist information about the type of biopsy you need.

Getting your results

After all the tests are complete we will discuss your case in a multidisciplinary meeting (MDM). This is where a team of specialist doctors and nurses will decide if we have found where the cancer has started or if your problem is not a cancer. You will then be offered an appointment to see the team who are best able to help you with your diagnosis.

Who can you talk to?

If you are an inpatient you will be supported by the MUO service – a specialist nurse and consultant. They will visit you on the ward to make sure that you understand what is happening. You and your family can ask questions or share concerns with this team.

If you are an outpatient you will be contacted by a specialist nurse from the MUO service. You may also be offered an appointment to come and see us in clinic while the tests are being completed.

You can contact your specialist nurse for psychological support and practical advice. If you have any questions about tests or what to expect from appointments, your specialist nurse will be able to help. We are here to support you and your family, so always contact us if you have any worries or concerns. Our contact details are on the next page.

Further information

Macmillan Cancer Support – Providers of practical, medical and financial advice and support for people with cancer and their families.

t: 0808 808 00 00 **w:** www.macmillan.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact the MUO nurse specialist team on **020 7188 5973** (Monday- Friday 9am-5pm). If you are feeling unwell, call the Acute Oncology Service on **020 7188 3754** (Monday-Friday 8:30am-6:30pm). Outside these hours, you can speak to the on-call doctor by calling **020 7188 7188** and asking the operator for the on-call oncology registrar.

Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets. For information leaflets on other conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets



Dimbleby Cancer Care provides cancer support services for Guy's and St Thomas'. We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918
e: DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved : become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk

w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Leaflet number: 4321/VER1

Date published: November 2016

Review date: November 2019

© 2016 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

