

Remember to bring in any medicines you are taking when you come into hospital. You may be asked to stop taking some medicines before your operation however this will be discussed with you prior to the surgery.

### Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists:

**Abolore Amuludun** (Abo) – 07568117015

[Abolore.Amuludun@bartshealth.nhs.uk](mailto:Abolore.Amuludun@bartshealth.nhs.uk)

**Michelle Marshall** – 07934904089

[Michelle.marshall@bartshealth.nhs.uk](mailto:Michelle.marshall@bartshealth.nhs.uk)

**Siobhan Moriarty** – 07709134148

[Siobhan.moriarty@bartshealth.nhs.uk](mailto:Siobhan.moriarty@bartshealth.nhs.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service

If you need general information or advice about Trust services, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 020 3594 2040 or visit [www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals](http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals). Alternatively please contact staff who are providing your care if you require clinical advice.

### Large print and other languages

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Patient information

## Having electrochemotherapy (ECT)

### Department of Plastic Surgery

2nd Floor John Harrison House

Royal London Hospital

London E1 1BB



## What is Electrochemotherapy?

Electrochemotherapy (ECT) is one of the treatments available at Barts Health for patients who have skin cancer.

During your treatment Bleomycin, the chemotherapy drug is injected either directly into the lesion or into your bloodstream and using a special probe sent into the cancerous cells using an electric pulse. The electric pulse lasts for less than a second and causes the outer layer(s) in the cancer membrane to open meaning that more of the anti-cancer drug can penetrate the cancer cells and dramatically increase the effectiveness of treatment.

## What type of cancer lesions can be treated?

- Basal and squamous cell cancers
- Melanoma
- Kaposi's sarcoma
- Breast, and head and neck cancers that have spread to the skin

It can also be considered as a palliative (non curative) option in cancers where surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy treatment is not a possibility.

## Are there any alternatives to electro chemotherapy?

Bart's Health is one of the few Plastic Surgery Units to provide ECT. The Plastic Surgeons will discuss with you if there are alternative forms of treatment that can be offered to treat your skin cancer.

## What are the benefits of Electrochemotherapy treatment?

ECT is an effective option in managing spreading cancer lesions without the scars and risks of undergoing surgery or having radiotherapy. It is a treatment that plastic surgeons have been using for cancer lesions that are painful or that bleed a lot.

## How long does my treatment last for?

A session of Electrochemotherapy usually lasts around half an hour.

## Are there any side effects to Bleomycin?

Like any form of drug treatment there are always potential side effects. As it is a chemotherapeutic drug its use may lead to symptoms similar to the flu on the day that you are treated. Other common side effects are:

- Skin rashes
- A general feeling of tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Some patients may experience nausea and very few may experience vomiting

The Plastic Surgeons will be able to answer your questions about potential side effects of the therapy before you decide if this treatment is right for you.

## If I decide I want this treatment, how is carried out?

ECT is usually an outpatient treatment, but occasionally people do need to stay in hospital for one night. A local anaesthetic is injected into the cancer lesion before treatment. If you are having treatment to a number of lesions you may need to also have a short general anaesthetic (be put to sleep). You will require only simple dressings and will usually be seen a week after the treatment in the Plastic Dressing Clinic or at a hospital nearer to your home. If you need to have a general anaesthetic you will need to stop eating and drinking the night before you come into hospital.

You may also need to have a pre assessment clinic appointment where your general health will be screened before your admission. We are usually able to offer you a date for your operation when you attend clinic but if this is not possible we will send you a letter in the post outlining a date for you. You will also be told which ward to attend, what time to arrive and what to bring in with you.