

## A Patient's Guide to Syringe Drivers

### **Consent**

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

### **Identification**

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet every time you attend.

This leaflet has been written in collaboration with oncologists, health professionals, patients and carers at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

If you have difficulty reading this size of print, a version of this leaflet or any of our leaflets can be produced for you in a larger print.

## A Patient's Guide to Syringe Drivers

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### Information

This leaflet aims to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about syringe drivers. As you are being offered one for your medication, we hope this information is helpful.

However, if anything is unclear please feel free to talk to a member of the health team caring for you.

### What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is basically a pump, which is operated by a battery. The pump is especially for people who need to take their medication regularly but find it difficult to take anything including medication by mouth (orally), or to help control symptoms prior to a return to oral medication.

It enables the medication to be infused (pumped into your body slowly), whilst you are free to carry on with your everyday life (doing whatever you need to do).

The syringe driver, as it is called, will be small enough for you to carry around in a pouch attached to a belt or in something like a traveller's 'bum bag'.

### What are the advantages of a syringe driver?

People of all ages with various medical conditions use a syringe driver for a number of reasons. It offers you the convenience of having your treatment whilst you are still 'getting on with things'. It also avoids you having to have lots of separate injections, which can be both painful and unpleasant.

Sometimes medication can be difficult to take because of nausea or vomiting, or difficulty in swallowing the tablets. The syringe driver enables you to continue to receive your essential medication such as painkillers and/or anti-sickness preparations, alone or combined in one or more syringe drivers.

The driver can be used as a temporary method of receiving treatment or it can be used for long periods of time for patients on regular medication.

### **How/where is the syringe attached to my body?**

The syringe driver will have a thin tube attached to it and will also have a small thin needle which will be put into the fatty tissue under your skin, and it will stay in place for a number of days.

The needle is held in place by a clear dressing which will help to keep it clean and dry. The needle site is usually on your chest or the upper part of your arm, but occasionally other parts of your body such as your upper leg or tummy may be an option.

### **What if the needle site becomes painful?**

If the site where the needle enters your body becomes uncomfortable, red or swollen, you must get it checked by a nurse or doctor, who will be pleased to help and advise you.

They may still continue with your medication but may decide to change the place on your body where the needle is to be inserted.

### **How will a syringe driver affect my lifestyle?**

One of the main purposes of having a syringe driver is to make your life more comfortable whilst you are receiving on-going medication. You may eat and drink as normal.

If you are able to get out and about, we would like to encourage you to keep to a normal routine. This includes taking some gentle exercise if you wish and if you feel able.



This photograph shows how easy it is to wear a syringe driver

### **What must I NOT do when I have a syringe driver?**

There are a few restrictions for you when you have a syringe driver. Remember it is not waterproof, so you must make sure that you keep your syringe driver and the needle site completely dry.

Please take extra care when you have a shower or a bath, and of course you must not go swimming whilst the driver is in place. The outside surface, however, can be cleaned by wiping it with a soft cloth dampened with a weak solution of water and detergent.

## Can I go on holiday when I have a syringe driver?

Yes, having a syringe driver should not prevent you from having a holiday, but please check first with the team treating you that it is all right to go away. This is particularly important because some drugs require you to have a licence to take them abroad.

If you are going out of the country, we advise you to carry a covering letter from your GP or hospital doctor, detailing the prescribed drugs and the doses that you are required to take with you.

The team will also help you if you wish, by teaching one of your family or friends how to change your syringe or contact a local health care professional (HCP) to help you when you are away.

## What do I need to know about my syringe driver?

The driver uses a 9-volt alkaline battery. We recommend you keep a spare battery with you at all times. The manufacturers of the syringe drivers recommend using good quality batteries.

When the motor in the driver is working, you will hear it making a whirring noise every few minutes, but only you will be able to hear it. There is a yellow light on the front of the driver, which flashes to tell you that your battery has enough power to run:

- The light on a BLUE syringe driver flashes once a second.
- The light on a GREEN syringe driver flashes once every 25 seconds.

If the light stops flashing, you will need to change the battery (even though there is still enough battery life for another 24 hours). So, if it is flashing before you go to bed, there is no need to worry about checking it overnight, as there will always be enough charge to finish the current syringe.

We have included the manufacturer's instructions to help you to change the battery: it is a good idea to get into the habit of checking that the light is flashing and that the motor is running.

## How do I change the battery?

If the battery needs changing and you have been shown how to do this by a hospital/District nurse and you feel confident to do so, then follow the procedure below, otherwise please contact your nurse/GP.

1. Remove the battery cover and just take note of how the battery fits.
2. Take out the old battery.
3. Insert the new battery.
4. If you have done it correctly, it will make a low-pitched noise.
5. This noise will fade after 10 seconds.
6. Replace the battery cover.

7. If you have a BLUE driver (MS16a), start the pump by pressing the white start/test button (the blue-labelled driver delivers medication by the hour).  
If you have a GREEN driver (MS26), start the pump by pressing the start/boost button (the green-labelled driver delivers medication by the day or for a 24-hr period).

8. A yellow light on the front of the driver will confirm that the power is on.

### **Is there anything else I need to know?**

Yes, you should know that all syringe drivers have only a 'start' button, they do not have a 'stop' button. Therefore, if for any reason you need to stop your medication flowing, you simply remove the battery.

The GREEN syringe driver has a start/boost/button. Please do not use this button to give yourself extra medication, as the amount given is very small and unlikely to have any useful effect. It will also cause the syringe driver to finish early.

If your symptoms are causing you problems, please contact your GP (family doctor) or your nurse. See the contact list at the end of this leaflet.

### **What else should I watch out for?**

If your driver sounds an alarm (which will fade after a few seconds), it could be indicating that the syringe may be empty, or that there is a blockage in the line. Don't worry, just follow the instructions below.

- If the syringe is empty, your nurse will need to replace it.
- If the syringe still has medication in it, then check your line, as there may be a 'kink' in the tubing.
- Look all along the line for any 'kinks' and 'untwist' the tubing if necessary.
- Press the start button to start your infusion. If problems persist after pressing the start button once, please seek advice from your nurse/GP.

If your infusion does not appear to be flowing, but the light is flashing, please contact your nurse/GP for advice.

If the place where the needle enters your body becomes red, swollen or uncomfortable, or if at any time during your treatment you become unwell, then you must contact one of the team treating you.

Please use the contact list at the end of this leaflet.

**Who will review the medication in my syringe driver?**

When you are in hospital, your medication will be reviewed by a trained nurse and when you are at home, it will normally be a district nurse.

**How often is the medication renewed?**

The medication in the syringe driver is normally renewed once a day, unless you need a change in dose or change of medication, when it will need to be renewed a second time.

This leaflet forms part of a series of publications produced by the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The LJMC is staffed by healthcare professionals and trained volunteers and is part of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

- Drop-in centre for support and information
- Telephone Helpline
- Benefits Advice \*
- Pre-treatment visits
- Complementary therapies \*
- Relaxation classes
- Counselling \*
- Support groups
- Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops

\* These services are available to patients under the care of an NHS oncologist-based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

**Contact Numbers**

Your GP ( family doctor ) : .....

Your District Nurse: .....

Your Community Macmillan nurse: .....

Hospital: .....

Macmillan Nurse: .....

Mount Vernon Cancer Network  
24 hour Advice Line: ..... 01923 844281

Your local out-of-hours contact is: .....

Opening hours: Mon - Fri: 9.30am - 1.00pm & 2.00 - 4.30pm

Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre  
situated between the Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)  
Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN  
Telephone Helpline: **01923 844014**  
[www.ljmc.org](http://www.ljmc.org)