

Plain English Summary

Zolbetuximab for untreated HER2-negative, claudin-18.2-positive, unresectable advanced gastric cancer

What does the guidance say?

Zolbetuximab, in combination with chemotherapy, is not recommended for government funding for patients with HER2-negative, claudin-18.2-positive, locally advanced unresectable or metastatic gastric or gastroesophageal junction (GEJ) cancer who have not had treatment before. It is not subsidised and cannot be claimed under MediShield Life.

What are gastric and GEJ cancers?

Gastric cancer occurs when cells grow uncontrollably and form a mass (tumour) in the stomach. Gastric adenocarcinoma is the most common type of gastric cancer. The cancer can also affect the area where the oesophagus meets the stomach. This is called gastroesophageal junction (GEJ) cancer. Symptoms of gastric or GEJ cancer can include difficulty swallowing, feeling full or bloated after eating, loss of appetite, heartburn, and unexplained weight loss.

Some people with gastric or GEJ cancer can have surgery to remove the cancer from the affected area. If the cancer cannot be removed (unresectable) and has spread nearby from where it started, this is known as locally advanced disease. If the cancer spreads to other parts of the body, this is known as metastatic disease.

What are HER2-negative, claudin-18.2-positive cancers?

Doctors test cancer cells for certain receptors (proteins) to determine the most appropriate type of treatment. Most people with gastric or GEJ cancer have normal amounts of a protein called human epidermal growth factor 2 (HER2) on the surface of the cancer cells. This is known as HER2-negative cancer. Some gastric or GEJ cancers have high levels of a protein called claudin 18.2 on the surface of the cancer cells, and this is called claudin-18.2-positive cancer. These cancer cells can be targeted with specific treatments.

What is zolbetuximab?

Zolbetuximab belongs to a group of targeted medicines called monoclonal antibodies. It works by helping the immune system find and destroy cancer cells that have the claudin 18.2 protein on their surface. It is given as a slow drip into a vein (intravenously), in combination with chemotherapy.

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Why was it not recommended for funding?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Zolbetuximab was not recommended for government funding because its benefits for patients with HER2-negative, claudin-18.2-positive, unresectable advanced gastric or GEJ cancer do not justify its cost. If you need zolbetuximab for this condition, you can speak to a medical social worker to find out if there is financial assistance available to help with the cost of treatment.

Is this the right treatment for me?

There are different types of treatments available for advanced gastric or GEJ cancer. Your doctor may recommend zolbetuximab if they consider it is the most suitable treatment for you. They should give you clear information, listen to your views and concerns, and talk to you about your treatment options. Some of the questions you may want to ask your doctor when making decisions about your care are:

- How will the treatment affect my day-to-day activities?
- How well does it work compared to other treatments?
- What are the side effects and risks of treatment, and how likely are they?
- How much does the treatment cost, and who can I approach if I want to find out whether there is financial assistance available to help with the cost of treatment?
- How long will I need to be on the treatment for?
- What happens if the treatment stops working?
- What happens if I do not want to have treatment?

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