



**Birmingham Women's
and Children's**
NHS Foundation Trust

Information for individuals with a
family history of cancer

Cancer Tissue Studies



By your side

Introduction

You, or your family member, have been referred to clinical genetics because of your family history of cancer. We have suggested some further studies on cancer tissue samples either from you (if you have been affected by cancer) or from one of your family members. This leaflet explains more about this.

What are tissue studies?

Tissue studies are tests on samples of a cancer. These tests will allow us to give the best advice about the family history and the risks to family members. They can also help to identify the cancers which are more likely to be inherited. The results can help us to recognise families where genetic testing may be useful.

Where does the tissue come from?

When someone has a cancer removed, or biopsy taken, small samples of the tissue are stored at the hospital. These samples can be useful if more tests are needed to help plan treatment. From 2017 recommendations are being issued to perform tissue studies as a routine test when diagnosing bowel cancer. Therefore it is possible tissue studies have already been carried out on your sample. If tissue studies have not yet been requested, or if the bowel cancer was diagnosed some time ago we can ask the hospital to send some tissue samples to us to test. Occasionally no tissue will be available at all.

What tests will be done?

There are two tests that can be done. They are called Immunohistochemistry (IHC) and

Microsatellite Instability (MSI) testing. Mostly, we only need to do the IHC test but very occasionally we also do the MSI test.

What are the tests looking for?

The tests are looking for signs of an inherited cancer condition called Lynch syndrome. Lynch syndrome is sometimes known as Hereditary Non Polyposis Colorectal Cancer (HNPCC). In families with Lynch syndrome there are usually several individuals with bowel, womb or other related cancers (eg. Stomach, Ovary). Lynch syndrome is caused by an alteration in one of a group of genes called mismatch repair genes. The two tests both look to see if these genes are working properly.

1. IHC:

This test dyes the cancer cells. The dyes stick to the material produced by the Lynch syndrome genes. If one of the Lynch syndrome genes is not working no material will be produced and the dye will not stick.

2. MSI:

This test looks at the DNA in the cancer cells to see if it is being repaired properly. If there are lots of mistakes in the DNA, we know that the mismatch repair genes aren't working correctly.

What happens next?

If the MSI and/or IHC tests are normal, it is much less likely that the cancers in the family are due to Lynch syndrome. They may be due to chance and not be inherited. Sometimes they may be due to another inherited cancer condition.

If the MSI and/or IHC tests show one of the genes is not working, it is much more likely that the cancers in the family are due to Lynch syndrome. We may suggest some extra screening for you and your relatives. We may also be able to do further tests to try and find the exact gene alteration in the family.

What about the results?

The tests are complicated and the results can take up to a year. The result time may vary depending on the time the test was issued, either as part of the routine tests at diagnosis (from 2017) or if the sample needs to be requested from storage. Tissue studies are performed quite quickly by the laboratory but the length of time taken to obtain a test result depends upon how quickly the tissue is retrieved by the pathology department storing the tissue. We will allow a period of up to 6 months to obtain tissue and perform the test with at least two requests for tissue before making further decisions on treatment. We will contact the person who has consented to the tests to give them the results. We will also update our advice about screening and whether any further testing could be useful. Someone from the genetics team will contact you to discuss this further if appropriate. Please feel free to contact the department to check on the progress of this testing.

What if no tissue is available?

Sometimes we cannot get a tissue sample. However, it may be possible to get one from another relative who has had a related cancer. If we cannot get tissue from any relatives, we will give advice based on the information we already have.

What do I need to do?

To go ahead with these tissue studies we need permission from the individual who has had cancer. If this individual has passed away, a relative can give permission on their behalf. If they passed away after September 2006, the highest living person on the list below must give permission.

1. Legally nominated representative (if applicable)
2. Spouse or partner
3. Parent or child
4. Brother or sister
5. Grandparent or grandchild
6. Child of brother or sister
7. Stepfather or stepmother
8. Half brother or half sister
9. Friend of longstanding

If you want us to go ahead with these tissue tests, you need to complete and return the appropriate consent form. If you do not have one of these consent forms and would like one, please contact the department.

If you do not want us to go ahead with the tests please let us know so we can provide advice based on the family history you have given without delay.

Further information

Lynch Syndrome leaflet
www.cancerresearchuk.org
www.macmillan.org.uk

If you need more advice please contact:
West Midlands Family Cancer Service
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Reviewed and updated: June 2017
Next review: June 2020
Ref No: CG4/CaTS

