

# Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia: the patient's journey

## WHAT IS CHRONIC LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKAEMIA (CLL)?

CLL is a disease resulting from a build-up of abnormal white blood cells in the bone marrow.<sup>1</sup>

Worldwide, the incidence of all leukaemias is estimated to be over 400,000 and CLL is estimated to affect around one-third of all people newly diagnosed with leukaemia.<sup>3,4</sup>

While CLL is slow-growing, there is no cure.<sup>2</sup>

CLL is the most common type of leukaemia in the Western world.<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF TREATING CLL?

Almost **70%** of patients are elderly (over 65) at diagnosis... **46%** of whom have comorbidities making treating them more complex.<sup>5</sup>

A key challenge in CLL treatment today is finding treatments that are tolerable and will give patients the most time without symptoms.

## HOW ARE CLL PATIENTS TREATED?

As CLL often grows slowly many patients will not be treated initially after diagnosis.

Instead, doctors will monitor them ("watchful waiting"), only initiating treatment if their disease worsens or they experience symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

When treatment is required, several options are available:<sup>2</sup>

- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapies
- Radiation therapy
- Bone marrow or stem cell transplant

Some targeted therapies are given until the disease progresses, sometimes over a number of years.

Others are given for a defined, short period allowing patients a valuable treatment-free window until the disease may return.

When the CLL returns, if the initial treatment wasn't effective, a different chemotherapy and/or targeted therapy may be used, depending on the patient's health.

However, if the initial treatment response lasted a long time (usually a few years) the same treatment can be used again.

## WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF TREATMENT?

In addition to achieving longer survival, treatment for CLL aims to ease or eliminate symptoms - this is called remission.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, long-term remission gives patients more time without receiving treatment, meaning they are free to live their lives with fewer visits to hospital or with reminders of their disease.

## HOW ARE TREATMENT OUTCOMES MEASURED?

Traditional measures of treatment benefit are the amount of time following treatment before a patient's disease progresses (progression free survival, PFS) and the time lived overall (overall survival, OS).<sup>6</sup>

While important, recent advances in treatment mean an increasingly long follow-up is required to demonstrate PFS and OS differences between treatment arms, and so innovative measures are necessary.

Click [here](#) to read more about the evolution of endpoints in oncology.

Despite advances in treatment allowing patients to benefit from long-term disease control, and without the need for additional treatment, there is still no cure for CLL.

Further research and treatment options are still required for patients battling with this disease.

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