

## **Discovery Health Press Release – Health Matters**

### **Fighting Childhood Cancer**

*May 2013*

#### **What is cancer?**

Cancer occurs when a healthy cell turns into an abnormal cell and then multiplies and grows quickly, out of control. These abnormal cells damage healthy cells as they grow, crowding them out and these abnormal cells can move into different parts of the body. Some types of cancer affect only a specific area in the body, while other types spread far from where they started. Cancers are named for where it first starts.

Each year in South Africa, one in 600 children under the age of 15 will get cancer. The most common childhood cancers are leukaemia, which affects the blood and bone marrow, lymphoma, which affects the immune system, brain tumours and neuroblastoma which affect the brain and nervous system, sarcomas which affect the kidney and skeletal tissues, and retinoblastoma which affects the eyes.

#### **The difference between cancers affecting children and adults**

Childhood cancers are different to adult cancers in that they respond differently to treatment, have different risk factors for the development of cancer in children and have a higher cure rate than for adults, with about 70% of children diagnosed with cancer being cured.

#### **How is childhood cancer treated?**

There are three main types of treatment available for childhood cancer, and these are chemotherapy which is medicine that is given orally or intravenously, radiation therapy and surgery. Before deciding on which treatment is best for your child, your doctor will consider the following factors, alongside with other factors:

- The type of cancer
- The stage of the cancer
- How fast it is growing
- Whether it has spread to other parts of the body and if so, where and how far
- Your child's age, symptoms and general health

#### **Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy uses medicines that travel in the blood stream destroying or slowing down the growth of cancerous cells, and can be given to reduce symptoms caused by the cancer. Chemotherapy can be given before and after surgery and radiotherapy.

#### **Radiation**

Radiation makes use of x-rays to send beams into the cancer cells, killing them and radiation only acts on that specific area. Radiation can be used on its own, or before surgery to shrink a lump, or after surgery to ensure that all the cancer cells are gone.

## **Surgery**

Surgery can be used to help diagnose some cancers, and where possible, used to remove a whole tumour. Even if the cancer has spread to other body parts, surgery can still be done. Surgery can cure children of cancer if there is no spread of the disease to other body parts.

## **How Discovery covers childhood cancer**

Cancer is one of the conditions covered under the Prescribed Minimum Benefits, which is a list of a set of conditions that all medical schemes, by law, must provide a basic level of cover for. This cover includes the diagnosis, treatment and costs of ongoing care. It is important for you to find out how your medical scheme will cover your child's cancer diagnosis, treatment and care.

Discovery Health Medical Scheme has a dedicated oncology benefit through the Oncology Programme for people with cancer, and provides one of the most comprehensive cover possible for cancer treatment. If your child is diagnosed with cancer, you can register your child on the *DiscoveryCare* Oncology Programme which provides your child with cover up to a certain limit for treatments such as chemotherapy, radiology, technical planning scans, specific blood tests and more.

Depending on the type of health plan you have chosen, the Scheme covers the first R200 000 or R400 000 of your child's approved cancer treatment in full, and up to the Discovery Health Rate over a 12 month rolling cycle. Cover is unlimited once your child's treatment goes over this amount, but a 20% co-payment is required for any further treatments. This co-payment amount may be more if your child's treatment costs are higher than the Discovery Health Rate. This applies to all health plans except for KeyCare, where only approved Prescribed Minimum Benefit level treatment is covered in full up to the Discovery Health Rate.