

## Patient information leaflet: Hospital Acquired Blood Clots

Some patients are at increased risk of developing blood clots in the veins of their legs, called Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). Following this, pieces of the clot can break off and travel to the lungs where they cause a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). These may be serious. To prevent clots in hospital you may undergo assessment and treatments to help avoid them.

### What is a DVT?

This is a clot that forms in a deep vein, usually in the leg. Deep veins are the larger veins that run through the muscles and transport blood to and from the heart. When a blood clot forms this blocks the flow.

### Is a DVT serious?

Yes, it can be. If the clot breaks off within the deep vein, it can travel through the bloodstream, through the heart and become lodged in the lung. This is known as a PE. It can happen hours, or even days, after a DVT.

### What are the risk factors for DVT and PE?

Anyone can suffer from a DVT but your risk is increased if any of the following apply to you:

- You are over 60 years old
- You are pregnant or have recently given birth
- You cannot move around much
- You have cancer
- You are taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or take a contraceptive pill that contains oestrogen
- You are overweight
- You have a family history of DVT
- You have had a previous DVT or PE
- You are having major surgery
- You are unwell with an infective or inflammatory illness

### Risk assessment

All patients who stay in hospital should be assessed for their risk of suffering from a DVT. You may be asked questions to discuss your risk factors. This may be undertaken in a pre-operative assessment or clinic prior to any planned admission.

### Preventing a hospital acquired DVT/PE

You can reduce your risk in a number of ways where possible, both in hospital, and after discharge:

- Keeping active as much as possible
- Avoiding long journeys



- Drinking plenty to avoid dehydration
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Stop smoking

In addition the hospital will provide you with treatments to reduce the risk:

### **Stockings**

You may be given support stockings as an inpatient and sometimes when you go home. These will be measured to ensure they fit correctly. These limit the amount of blood pooling in the legs reducing the risk of developing a clot. When you are in hospital they are worn day and night. They should be removed occasionally for washing and to make sure that the skin of the leg is not becoming damaged. Whilst at home it may be beneficial to continue to wear them until your mobility is back to normal.

### **Prescribed medicines**

You may be given anticoagulants (“blood thinners”) when you come into hospital to reduce your risk of developing clots. As they act to reduce the ability of the blood to clot, their main side effect may be unwanted bleeding. However, this is taken into account during the risk assessment outlined above, and will not be prescribed if it is thought that bleeding may occur. For most patients though, the risk of bleeding is very low and is much less than the risk of developing a clot.

The medicines that may be prescribed are:

- Enoxaparin - This is a form of heparin and injected into the skin
- Fondaparinux - is also an injection, but is non-heparin and as such does not contain animal substances.
- Apixaban and Rivaroxaban are anticoagulant tablets
- Aspirin – a tablet that can help prevent blood cells (called platelets) from clumping together to form a clot.

### **What are the symptoms of a DVT?**

Many DVTs are “silent” and produce no symptoms, but if there are, they may include:

- Leg swelling and pain
- Tenderness of the affected leg
- Discoloration of the skin

### **What are the symptoms of a PE?**

- Chest pain
- Breathlessness
- Blood stained spit
- Loss of consciousness

## Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

Your GP will receive a letter of your treatment in hospital. Please ask the ward staff who will gladly assist you with any queries.

If you develop any of the symptoms of DVT or PE please telephone 111 who will direct you to the right service.

If you experience chest pain or shortness of breath you should attend your nearest Emergency Department or call 999.

## How to provide feedback

Our aim is to provide a quality of care we would want for ourselves, our families and friends. If there was anything that we could have done please let us know via the department/ward staff or the patient experience team available on 01432 372986 or email [pals@wvt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@wvt.nhs.uk) (opening times may vary).

This leaflet is available in large print, braille, audio tape or other languages upon request. Please contact patient experience team on the above telephone number.

You may be asked to give your opinion on the service you have received. We welcome your feedback as this will help us to improve the care and treatment we provide to our patients.

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