

## Carcinoma of the Pancreas

This form of cancer has shown an increasing incidence over the last decades as reflected in the increasing number of cancer - related deaths due to it. It accounts for about 10% of all gastro-intestinal cancers and for 1-2% of all cancers seen. The ratio of male to female is in the order of 2 to 1. In South Africa the incidence is higher in blacks than in whites with a peak incidence in patients over 65 years old.

There is an increase in people who smoke and/or use alcohol excessively. It is invariably diagnosed when it is advanced, because of a lack of specific symptoms or signs. The most common presenting symptoms are: pain radiating to the back, abdominal discomfort and jaundice.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- Biopsy or needle aspiration of the tumour mass
- CT Scan Abdomen and/or Ultrasound
- Chest X-ray
- Specialized endoscopic examinations
- Blood analysis

*Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation.*

### Treatment options

*Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.*

Surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy are all commonly used in treating this disease; they can be used separately or as combination therapy. Surgery remains the best hope for long-term cures if at all feasible; it is only possible in early stage disease without signs of distant spread.

Radiation with or without chemotherapy can also be used in cases where there is localized disease. It may also be used after surgery to diminish the risk for future relapses. In advanced stages of the disease, chemotherapy is often used in a palliative setting. It can do much to improve quality of life even though cures are seldom seen.

*The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.*