

KARPOSI'S SARCOMA

In Kaposi's sarcoma cancerous cells are found in the tissues underneath the skin or mucous membranes that line the mouth, nose or gastrointestinal tract. It usually presents as red or purple patches in these areas and can spread to adjacent lymph nodes as well as to other organs, such as the lungs or liver.

Until the early 1980's Kaposi's sarcoma was a very rare disease that was found mainly in older men, it was also common in patients who had organ transplants. Today it is mostly associated with immune deficiencies and therefore very common in people with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) where it is called epidemic Kaposi's. In these cases it tends to be a more aggressive disease.

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

- Biopsy of a lesion to confirm the diagnosis
- Chest X-ray and/or ultrasound of upper abdomen
- 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 is commonly employed in earlier stages of the disease, the disease is however seldom limited to one area that can be encompassed by surgery alone. In these cases the use of surgery is limited to the taking of a biopsy.

In the majority of cases either radiation or chemotherapy is used with good local responses. Biological therapy, including immunotherapy, is playing an increasing role in the management of this disease. The patient should also start taking anti-retroviral medication as soon as possible if diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

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.