

Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)



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Fact Sheet on Fibromyxoid Sarcoma

Introduction

A sarcoma is a type of cancer that develops from certain tissues, like bone or muscle. Bone and soft tissue sarcomas are the main types of sarcoma. Soft tissue sarcomas can develop from soft tissues like fat, muscle, nerves, fibrous tissues, blood vessels, or deep skin tissues. They can be found in any part of the body. Most of them develop in the arms or legs. They can also be found in the trunk, head and neck area, internal organs, and the area in back of the abdominal cavity (known as the retroperitoneum). Sarcomas are not common tumours.



[Picture Credit: Fibromyxoid Sarcoma]

There are many types of soft tissue tumours, and not all of them are cancerous. When the term sarcoma is part of the name of a disease, it means the tumour is malignant (cancer). Some soft tissue tumours behave in a way in between a cancer and a non-cancer. These are called *intermediate*.

(American Cancer Society)

Fibromyxoid Sarcoma (LGFMS)

Low-grade Fibromyxoid Sarcomas are uncommon (rare) deep soft tissue neoplasms first described by Dr Harry Evans in 1987. It exhibits a deceptively benign appearance, with a whorled or linear arrangement of spindle-shaped cells showing few to absent mitoses. A characteristic, but not specific, feature is the presence of areas of myxoid stroma. It is mostly diagnosed in young adults although cases have been reported in the paediatric and older populations. Low-grade Fibromyxoid Sarcoma is also known as Evans Tumour.

Recurrences are common, and late metastases (spread) have been recorded. Low grade fibromyxoid sarcoma belongs to the group of fibroblastic/myofibroblastic soft tissue tumours. Two main subtypes have been recognised: classical low grade fibromyxoid sarcoma and low grade fibromyxoid sarcoma with giant collagen rosettes.

(Archives of Pathology; Atlas of Genetics and Cytogenetics in Oncology and Haematology; Indab, *et al.*; Wikipedia).

Incidence of Fibromyxoid Sarcoma (LGFMS) in South Africa

The National Cancer Registry (2012) does not provide any information regarding the incidence of Fibromyxoid Sarcoma.

Risk Factors for Fibromyxoid Sarcoma

A risk factor is anything that changes one's chance of getting a disease like cancer.

Different cancers have different risk factors. For example, unprotected exposure to strong sunlight (ultraviolet rays) is a risk factor for skin cancer. Smoking is a risk factor for cancers of the lung, and many other cancers.

Having a risk factor, or even several risk factors, does not mean that one will get the cancer. Also, many people get cancer without having a risk factor. Scientists have found a few risk factors that make a person more likely to develop soft tissue sarcomas. These include:

- Radiation
- Certain family cancer syndromes
- A damaged lymph system

Exposure to certain chemicals, Injury and lifestyle factors such as smoking, diet, and exercise are NOT linked to the risk of soft tissue sarcoma. (American Cancer Society).

Clinical Features of Fibromyxoid Sarcoma (LGFMS)

- Prolonged preclinical stage
- Slow-growing, painless soft tissue mass (1-18 cm)
- Earlier studies suggested only a small subset metastasised, but a more recent study with long term follow-up reported recurrence in 64%, metastasis in 45%, and death from the disease in 42%
- Patients with positive/uncertain margins are more likely to have recurrence (up to 15 years later; median 3,5 years)
- Metastasises usually to lungs, pleura, chest wall (up to 45 years later; median 5 years)

(PathologyOutlines.com).

Diagnosis of Fibromyxoid Sarcoma (LGFMS)

The standard diagnostic program includes:

- a clinical examination
- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan of the tumour area
- chest X-ray
- computerised tomography (CT) scan
- core-needle or incisional biopsy

(Hindawi).

Treatment of Fibromyxoid Sarcoma (LGFMS)

Treatment for fibrosarcoma remains focused on treatment of the primary tumour. Surgery is the only curative treatment available for these tumours, and radiation is often used when the tumour measures at least 5 cm in size. The use of chemotherapy after surgical removal of the original tumour to try and destroy microscopic undetected metastatic disease to other parts of the body (adjuvant chemotherapy) remains controversial.

Like all sarcomas, the risk of recurrence after surgical treatment depends on the stage of disease. For sarcomas that are localised, low grade sarcomas are stage I, and large, high-grade, deep sarcomas are stage III. If a sarcoma does not have all three features (large, high-grade, and deep), it is stage II. Sarcomas that have travelled to lymph nodes or other sites of the body beyond where they started are considered stage IV, or metastatic, disease.

If fibrosarcoma forms metastases, such metastases are usually located in the lungs. If the tumours cannot be easily removed from the lungs surgically (typically when there are multiple tumours or if they are found in difficult locations in the lungs) then chemotherapy is used in an attempt to control the tumour. A standard chemotherapy drug, such as doxorubicin (in its regular form, or in an encapsulated form called Doxil or Caelyx) is frequently used for metastatic disease, and ifosfamide chemotherapy with the bladder protectant mesna is often used as well.

Dacarbazine (DTIC) can be considered for treatment of these tumours, as can other commercially available drugs not specifically approved for sarcomas, such as the combination of gemcitabine and docetaxel. In this setting, when available, new medications under study can be used either before or after use of standard chemotherapy drugs in clinical studies, available from an increasing number of institutions.

There is presently no specific “targeted” therapy against fibrosarcoma because there are no identified proteins unique to fibrosarcomas that could be used as targets for such treatment. However, it is expected that new drugs available for other soft tissue sarcomas will be used for fibrosarcomas as well.
(Sarcoma Foundation of America).

About Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are research studies that involve people. These studies test new ways to prevent, detect, diagnose, or treat diseases. People who take part in cancer clinical trials have an opportunity to contribute to scientists’ knowledge about cancer and to help in the development of improved cancer treatments. They also receive state-of-the-art care from cancer experts.

Types of Clinical Trials

Cancer clinical trials differ according to their primary purpose. They include the following types:

Treatment - these trials test the effectiveness of new treatments or new ways of using current treatments in people who have cancer. The treatments tested may include new drugs or new combinations of currently used drugs, new surgery or radiation therapy techniques, and vaccines or other treatments that stimulate a person’s immune system to fight cancer. Combinations of different treatment types may also be tested in these trials.

Prevention - these trials test new interventions that may lower the risk of developing certain types of cancer. Most cancer prevention trials involve healthy people who have not had cancer; however, they often only include people who have a higher than average risk of developing a specific type of cancer. Some cancer prevention trials involve people who have had cancer in the past; these trials test interventions that may help prevent the return (recurrence) of the original cancer or reduce the chance of developing a new type of cancer

Screening - these trials test new ways of finding cancer early. When cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat and there may be a better chance of long-term survival. Cancer screening trials usually involve people who do not have any signs or symptoms of cancer. However, participation in these trials is often limited to people who have a higher than average risk of developing a certain type of cancer because they have a family history of that type of cancer or they have a history of exposure to cancer-causing substances (e.g., cigarette smoke).

Diagnostic - these trials study new tests or procedures that may help identify, or diagnose, cancer more accurately. Diagnostic trials usually involve people who have some signs or symptoms of cancer.

Quality of life or supportive care - these trials focus on the comfort and quality of life of cancer patients and cancer survivors. New ways to decrease the number or severity of side effects of cancer or its treatment are often studied in these trials. How a specific type of cancer or its treatment affects a person's everyday life may also be studied.

Where Clinical Trials are Conducted

Cancer clinical trials take place in cities and towns in doctors' offices, cancer centres and other medical centres, community hospitals and clinics. A single trial may take place at one or two specialised medical centres only or at hundreds of offices, hospitals, and centres.

Each clinical trial is managed by a research team that can include doctors, nurses, research assistants, data analysts, and other specialists. The research team works closely with other health professionals, including other doctors and nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacists, dieticians, and social workers, to provide medical and supportive care to people who take part in a clinical trial.

Research Team

The research team closely monitors the health of people taking part in the clinical trial and gives them specific instructions when necessary. To ensure the reliability of the trial's results, it is important for the participants to follow the research team's instructions. The instructions may include keeping logs or answering questionnaires. The research team may also seek to contact the participants regularly after the trial ends to get updates on their health.

Clinical Trial Protocol

Every clinical trial has a protocol, or action plan, that describes what will be done in the trial, how the trial will be conducted, and why each part of the trial is necessary. The protocol also includes guidelines for who can and cannot participate in the trial. These guidelines, called eligibility criteria, describe the characteristics that all interested people must have before they can take part in the trial. Eligibility criteria can include age, sex, medical history, and

current health status. Eligibility criteria for cancer treatment trials often include the type and stage of cancer, as well as the type(s) of cancer treatment already received.

Enrolling people who have similar characteristics helps ensure that the outcome of a trial is due to the intervention being tested and not to other factors. In this way, eligibility criteria help researchers obtain the most accurate and meaningful results possible.

National and International Regulations

National and international regulations and policies have been developed to help ensure that research involving people is conducted according to strict scientific and ethical principles. In these regulations and policies, people who participate in research are usually referred to as “human subjects.”

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a process through which people learn the important facts about a clinical trial to help them decide whether or not to take part in it, and continue to learn new information about the trial that helps them decide whether or not to continue participating in it.

During the first part of the informed consent process, people are given detailed information about a trial, including information about the purpose of the trial, the tests and other procedures that will be required, and the possible benefits and harms of taking part in the trial. Besides talking with a doctor or nurse, potential trial participants are given a form, called an informed consent form, that provides information about the trial in writing. People who agree to take part in the trial are asked to sign the form. However, signing this form does not mean that a person must remain in the trial. Anyone can choose to leave a trial at any time—either before it starts or at any time during the trial or during the follow-up period. It is important for people who decide to leave a trial to get information from the research team about how to leave the trial safely.

The informed consent process continues throughout a trial. If new benefits, risks, or side effects are discovered during the course of a trial, the researchers must inform the participants so they can decide whether or not they want to continue to take part in the trial. In some cases, participants who want to continue to take part in a trial may be asked to sign a new informed consent form.

New interventions are often studied in a stepwise fashion, with each step representing a different “phase” in the clinical research process. The following phases are used for cancer treatment trials:

Phases of a Clinical Trial

Phase 0. These trials represent the earliest step in testing new treatments in humans. In a phase 0 trial, a very small dose of a chemical or biologic agent is given to a small number of people (approximately 10-15) to gather preliminary information about how the agent is processed by the body (pharmacokinetics) and how the agent affects the body (pharmacodynamics). Because the agents are given in such small amounts, no information is obtained about their safety or effectiveness in treating cancer. Phase 0 trials are also called micro-dosing studies, exploratory Investigational New Drug (IND) trials, or early phase I trials. The people who take part in these trials usually have advanced disease, and no known, effective treatment options are available to them.

Phase I (also called phase 1). These trials are conducted mainly to evaluate the safety of chemical or biologic agents or other types of interventions (e.g., a new radiation therapy technique). They help determine the maximum dose that can be given safely (also known as the maximum tolerated dose) and whether an intervention causes harmful side effects. Phase I trials enrol small numbers of people (20 or more) who have advanced cancer that cannot be treated effectively with standard (usual) treatments or for which no standard treatment exists. Although evaluating the effectiveness of interventions is not a primary goal of these trials, doctors do look for evidence that the interventions might be useful as treatments.

Phase II (also called phase 2). These trials test the effectiveness of interventions in people who have a specific type of cancer or related cancers. They also continue to look at the safety of interventions. Phase II trials usually enrol fewer than 100 people but may include as many as 300. The people who participate in phase II trials may or may not have been treated previously with standard therapy for their type of cancer. If a person has been treated previously, their eligibility to participate in a specific trial may depend on the type and amount of prior treatment they received. Although phase II trials can give some indication of whether or not an intervention works, they are almost never designed to show whether an intervention is better than standard therapy.

Phase III (also called phase 3). These trials compare the effectiveness of a new intervention, or new use of an existing intervention, with the current standard of care (usual treatment) for a particular type of cancer. Phase III trials also examine how the side effects of the new intervention compare with those of the usual treatment. If the new intervention is more effective than the usual treatment and/or is easier to tolerate, it may become the new standard of care.

Phase III trials usually involve large groups of people (100 to several thousand), who are randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups, or “trial arms”: (1) a control group, in which everyone in the group receives usual treatment for their type of cancer, or 2) an investigational or experimental group, in which everyone in the group receives the new intervention or new use of an existing intervention. The trial participants are assigned to their individual groups by random assignment, or randomisation. Randomisation helps ensure that the groups have similar characteristics. This balance is necessary so the researchers can have confidence that any differences they observe in how the two groups respond to the treatments they receive are due to the treatments and not to other differences between the groups.

Randomisation is usually done by a computer program to ensure that human choices do not influence the assignment to groups. The trial participants cannot request to be in a particular group, and the researchers cannot influence how people are assigned to the groups. Usually, neither the participants nor their doctors know what treatment the participants are receiving.

People who participate in phase III trials may or may not have been treated previously. If they have been treated previously, their eligibility to participate in a specific trial may depend on the type and the amount of prior treatment they received.

In most cases, an intervention will move into phase III testing only after it has shown promise in phase I and phase II trials.

Phase IV (also called phase 4). These trials further evaluate the effectiveness and long-term safety of drugs or other interventions. They usually take place after a drug or intervention has been approved by the medicine regulatory office for standard use. Several hundred to several thousand people may take part in a phase IV trial. These trials are also known as post-marketing surveillance trials. They are generally sponsored by drug companies.

Sometimes clinical trial phases may be combined (e.g., phase I/II or phase II/III trials) to minimize the risks to participants and/or to allow faster development of a new intervention.

Although treatment trials are always assigned a phase, other clinical trials (e.g., screening, prevention, diagnostic, and quality-of-life trials) may not be labelled this way.

Use of Placebos

The use of placebos as comparison or “control” interventions in cancer treatment trials is rare. If a placebo is used by itself, it is because no standard treatment exists. In this case, a trial would compare the effects of a new treatment with the effects of a placebo. More often, however, placebos are given along with a standard treatment. For example, a trial might compare the effects of a standard treatment plus a new treatment with the effects of the same standard treatment plus a placebo.

Possible benefits of taking part in a clinical trial

The benefits of participating in a clinical trial include the following:

- Trial participants have access to promising new interventions that are generally not available outside of a clinical trial.
- The intervention being studied may be more effective than standard therapy. If it is more effective, trial participants may be the first to benefit from it.
- Trial participants receive regular and careful medical attention from a research team that includes doctors, nurses, and other health professionals.
- The results of the trial may help other people who need cancer treatment in the future.
- Trial participants are helping scientists learn more about cancer (e.g., how it grows, how it acts, and what influences its growth and spread).

Potential harms associated with taking part in a clinical trial

The potential harms of participating in a clinical trial include the following:

- The new intervention being studied may not be better than standard therapy, or it may have harmful side effects that doctors do not expect or that are worse than those associated with standard therapy.
- Trial participants may be required to make more visits to the doctor than they would if they were not in a clinical trial and/or may need to travel farther for those visits.

Correlative research studies, and how they are related to clinical trials

In addition to answering questions about the effectiveness of new interventions, clinical trials provide the opportunity for additional research. These additional research studies, called correlative or ancillary studies, may use blood, tumour, or other tissue specimens (also known as ‘biospecimens’) obtained from trial participants before, during, or after treatment. For example, the molecular characteristics of tumour specimens collected during a trial

might be analysed to see if there is a relationship between the presence of a certain gene mutation or the amount of a specific protein and how trial participants responded to the treatment they received. Information obtained from these types of studies could lead to more accurate predictions about how individual patients will respond to certain cancer treatments, improved ways of finding cancer earlier, new methods of identifying people who have an increased risk of cancer, and new approaches to try to prevent cancer.

Clinical trial participants must give their permission before biospecimens obtained from them can be used for research purposes.

When a clinical trial is over

After a clinical trial is completed, the researchers look carefully at the data collected during the trial to understand the meaning of the findings and to plan further research. After a phase I or phase II trial, the researchers decide whether or not to move on to the next phase or stop testing the intervention because it was not safe or effective. When a phase III trial is completed, the researchers analyse the data to determine whether the results have medical importance and, if so, whether the tested intervention could become the new standard of care.

The results of clinical trials are often published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Peer review is a process by which cancer research experts not associated with a trial review the study report before it is published to make sure that the data are sound, the data analysis was performed correctly, and the conclusions are appropriate. If the results are particularly important, they may be reported by the media and discussed at a scientific meeting and by patient advocacy groups before they are published in a journal. Once a new intervention has proven safe and effective in a clinical trial, it may become a new standard of care. (National Cancer Institute).

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Fibromyxoid Sarcoma

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