

A Patient's Guide to having Radiotherapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Please read all of this leaflet before starting treatment

Patient Information Series No 1

Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your radiotherapy planning and treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms by the oncologist who first advised radiotherapy, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

Pregnancy/fathering a child

Female patients must not be pregnant or become pregnant and male patients must not father a child during a course of radiotherapy or for some months afterwards. **Please discuss this with your cancer specialist.**

If you think there is a chance, however small, of you or your partner being pregnant during treatment, it is extremely important that you discuss this with your oncologist, radiographer or nurse as soon as possible.

Female Patients will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status prior to radiotherapy. This applies to all women between the ages of 12 - 55 years. This is a legal requirement.

Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet every time you attend.

A Patient's Guide to Radiotherapy

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This leaflet has been written in collaboration with oncologists, health professionals, patients and carers at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

If you have difficulty reading this size of print, a version of this leaflet or any of our leaflets can be produced for you in a larger print.

Introduction

Your cancer specialist has recommended that your cancer is treated with a course of radiotherapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre. This leaflet is a simple guide to radiotherapy treatment.

While it does not deal with every issue, we hope it will answer some of your questions. It forms part of a series of leaflets about radiotherapy, some of which deal with specific types of treatment to particular parts of the body. You may also be given one or more of these leaflets.

If you have any further questions before, during or after your treatment, please do not hesitate to contact one of the team treating you - there are some contact telephone numbers at the end of the leaflet.

Who will be looking after me?

A specialist cancer doctor is known as a clinical oncologist (or radiotherapist).

The oncologist¹ will plan and oversee your treatment, which will be carried out by therapy radiographers (health professionals who give radiotherapy treatment) and their assistants.

You will be seen regularly during your treatment by a Clinic Review Radiographer or nurse. Your Oncologist's team is available to see you if required during your treatment.

¹ The term 'oncologist' refers to both your cancer specialist and any doctors working within his/her team.

In addition, the team looking after you during your treatment may include:

- nurses/specialist nurses
- health care assistants
- counsellors
- dietitians
- dosimetrists (health professionals specialising in calculation of radiation dosage and design of treatment plans)

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of precise, accurately measured doses of radiation directed to a specific area to treat cancer cells.

The most common type of radiotherapy used to treat cancer is external beam radiotherapy. This means that a programmed course of radiation therapy is applied at regular intervals using an external radiation beam or beams.

External beam radiotherapy:

- does not make you radioactive and it is perfectly safe for you to be with people, including children.
- treatment is completely painless.
- radiation cannot be seen or felt while it is being given.

A course of radiotherapy treatment may be one single treatment session or it may be five treatments a week for seven weeks. Your radiotherapy course will depend on a number of factors including the part of your body being treated and the aim of the treatment.

Most treatments are carried out daily between Monday and Friday. In the event of a Bank Holiday or interruption due to unavoidable circumstances, your treatment schedule may change.

Although the radiation affects both cancer and normal cells, it has a greater effect on the cancer cells.

Treatment aimed at a cure will give the highest possible dose of radiation (within safe limits) to the area involved to attempt to kill the cancer cells. Sometimes smaller doses are used, where the aim is to reduce the size of a tumour and/or relieve symptoms.

Your oncologist will discuss with you the specific details of your treatment and any possible side-effects which you may experience. You will be given this information in a separate leaflet.

How is my treatment planned?

Every course of radiotherapy is designed to suit the needs of the person receiving it. More specific information will be given to you at your planning appointment.

Please be aware that your planning appointment can take most of the day.

Your planning day

1. When you arrive at the Cancer Centre please check in at the reception desk.
2. The receptionist will ask you to confirm your details.
3. You will be directed to one of our waiting rooms where you should wait to be called in by a member of staff. Please note that there are several clinics operating simultaneously with patients all waiting in the same area, so you will not necessarily be called in the order you arrive.
4. At every visit you will be asked to confirm your name, address and date of birth. This is to ensure you have been correctly identified. At your first visit you will be asked to sign a consent form for treatment, and a form to confirm you are not pregnant if applicable.
5. The planning will usually take place in either the simulator or CT simulator room and you may have to come for more than one planning session before the start of your treatment.
6. The radiographers will explain in detail what these machines do, but in general terms they take X-ray pictures to accurately identify the area to be treated.
7. The radiographers, doctors and physicists will take measurements and record all the information necessary to be able to deliver the treatment accurately.

8. Marks will be placed on your skin using a felt-tip pen. Permanent marks (tattoos) similar to a tiny dot will be applied so that when the pen marks fade your treatment can be aligned accurately. This takes the form of a few pinpricks just into the skin.
 9. Staff will be concentrating on the technical aspects of their work during the measuring process and may not be able to talk to you in great detail, but will keep you informed of what they are doing. If you have any questions please raise them before this stage, or afterwards.
 10. If you have come with a relative or friend they will not be able to be with you in the room during this part of the process because of the X-rays involved, though a full explanation can be given to them if you wish.
 11. Once the planning is complete you will be given your appointments for subsequent sessions and some written information describing the treatment and the side-effects.
- A few tips that you may find helpful:
- Wear comfortable clothes that can be removed easily. It is helpful to wear separates.
 - Try to ensure you are free for the whole day as sometimes you will be delayed during this visit.
 - Many patients find it useful to bring a friend or relative to this appointment to help absorb all the detailed information.

Do I have to stay in hospital?

If you are able to travel to the hospital for treatment, there is no need for you to be admitted during the course of your treatment. Most people are treated as outpatients.

If you live a long way from the hospital but do not need to be admitted, then with permission from your oncologist, you may be able to stay at CHART Lodge, a hostel on the hospital site near the treatment centre available for patients, relatives and friends.

Please ask one of the team treating you for a leaflet if you would like to know more about CHART Lodge.

Hospital transport facilities are very limited and are only available for patients. Please speak with your treatment team if you need to request transport.

What about working?

Each person's reaction to treatment is unique. Daily treatment sessions can cause you to feel more tired especially as your treatment continues. This tiredness may make it difficult to carry on working. However, if you feel you wish to carry on working, there is no reason why you should not continue to do so throughout your course of treatment as long as your oncologist agrees.

Finances

If you work, it is advisable to inform your employer that you may need time off work.

We understand that this may impact upon your household income. There is a benefits advisor available for patients and carers at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

Your specialist nurse will also be able to give you advice and information on Macmillan grants and their benefits service (see contacts on page 14).

If you normally pay for NHS prescriptions

People undergoing treatment for cancer do not have to pay NHS prescription charges if they have a valid medical exemption certificate.

Apply for an exemption certificate by collecting an application form from your GP or cancer clinic.

Pre-treatment information sessions

We would like to invite you to a pre-treatment information session held in the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) at Mount Vernon Hospital. These sessions provide an opportunity to learn about radiotherapy treatment, but please note that it is not possible to discuss diagnoses or arrange individual treatment appointments at this visit.

These sessions take place at various times. They are hosted by health professionals, and include:

- An opportunity to familiarise yourself with the facilities available in the Cancer Centre and receive further information about radiotherapy.
- A chance to ask staff any general questions.
- Information on services offered at the LJMC for cancer support and information.

In order to ensure that there are enough staff members present, please call us on 01923 844014 to book your place (space is limited).

You are welcome to bring one friend or relative with you. If you wish to do this, please also book a place for them. Please arrive promptly at the start of the session at the LJMC.

Getting to Mount Vernon Hospital

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre is based at Mount Vernon Hospital, Rickmansworth Road, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN.

A map of the Mount Vernon Hospital site and directions on how to get there can be found on the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre website: www.ljmc.org or you can call the LJMC on 01923 844014 for a copy.

Car parking at the hospital

A Pay & Display parking scheme operates 24 hours a day. Patients attending the Cancer Centre can buy tokens at a reduced rate, available from the Car Park office located near the main hospital entrance. Follow the signs from the Oak Tree Restaurant or ask at Patient Affairs.

You will need to show your appointment card/letter. Each token entitles you to park for up to ten hours.

Blue badge holders may park in a designated disabled bay or in any bay in a car park. They do not need to display a ticket but MUST display their badge for free parking.

Getting help with paying for transport

If you are on a low income, you may be eligible for help with paying for the cost of transport to and from the hospital. This includes bus and train fares and car mileage but not taxi costs.

For further information about eligibility, please speak to Patient Affairs (01923 844292) or visit www.direct.gov.uk and search for 'Travel costs'.

Restaurant/coffee bar

- Oak Tree Restaurant
The Oak Tree Restaurant provides a self-service cafeteria, hot meals & snack service. It is generally open:

Snacks:	7am - 7.45pm	7 days a week
Mealtimes:		
Breakfast	7am - 10.30am	7 days a week
Lunch	11.30am - 2.00pm	7 days a week
Supper	5.00pm - 7.45pm	7 days a week

- Coffee Bar
A coffee bar serving hot and cold drinks and snacks is located in the radiotherapy waiting area (opening hours are 10am - 4pm Monday to Friday). This facility is run by volunteers and any profits made go to help Mount Vernon Hospital.

Other information

At Mount Vernon Cancer Centre there may be students present while you are examined or being treated. Please do not hesitate to say if you would prefer them to leave the room. No one will mind, and this will not affect your treatment or care in any way.

You will receive further information during your radiotherapy treatment. This will include specific information on the part of your body you are having treated, as well as the leaflet 'Finishing a Course of Radiotherapy' (PI 27).

A number of other leaflets are available that you may find helpful. These include:

- Helpful Hints Series on various side-effects
- Helpful Contacts Series: details of local and national organisations and support groups.
- Chart Lodge (hostel)
- Financial Advice
- Complementary Therapies
- Counselling

If you are having radiotherapy to a specific part of your body please ask for other relevant information.

Leaflets are available from the team that is treating you and also from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (details on the back of this leaflet).

Other support

Please remember... If you would like to discuss anything covered in this leaflet, the treatment centre staff are happy to talk with you and try to help you with any problems.

You can also drop in to the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre at Mount Vernon Hospital (see back cover). The Centre is staffed by health professionals as well as trained volunteers, and is an integral part of the main Cancer Centre.

Please do not hesitate about asking questions - we will be pleased to give you help and advice wherever possible.

Contacts

Checklist for you to complete

Your Oncologist is Dr/Prof

Your hospital number

Your treatment start date.....

Length of your course of treatment.....

Radiotherapy Clinic Nurses:01923 844267

Radiotherapy Clinic Radiographers:01923 844548

Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre:01923 844014

Your follow-up will be at

Radiotherapy for planning related enquiries: call hospital
switchboard and ask for extension 2154
(Mon - Fri 8.30am - 5pm).....01923 826111

Radiotherapy Reception for all other enquiries
(Mon - Fri 8.30am - 5pm).....01923 844469

This is a space for
your hospital sticker

