

A Patient's Guide to Rectal Brachytherapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Consent

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

If you have already been given one of these forms, 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.

Identification

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

You must wear your name band at all times whilst in hospital.

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.

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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

This leaflet aims to explain what happens when you have brachytherapy to your rectum (back passage).

Whilst it doesn't cover all the issues, it is intended as a guide to help you understand more about this particular treatment and procedure involved.

The cancer specialist is in charge of your care and, throughout this leaflet, we will refer to him/her as the oncologist.¹

The oncologist in charge of the brachytherapy will see you some time before your treatment, and explain the procedure to you.

You will also have the opportunity to discuss your treatment beforehand with the brachytherapy staff and, if you wish, may be shown the room where the treatment is given.

What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is a form of radiotherapy given by directly introducing a radiation source into the part of your body we wish to treat. The brachytherapy machine uses a small radioactive source which produces gamma rays.

It may only be necessary to give the treatment once, or it may be given in combination with surgery, or may be given following a course of radiotherapy.

The oncologist will decide and explain which treatment is best for you.

¹ Throughout this leaflet the term 'oncologist' will refer to both your cancer specialist (oncologist) and any doctors working within his/her team.

What does the treatment involve?

Usually you will be treated as an outpatient and the whole procedure will take about 45 minutes, although the actual treatment will only take between 10 -15 minutes. You will not require a general anaesthetic.

Occasionally it may be necessary to admit you to hospital for this treatment, but the oncologist will advise you if this is the case.

You may eat and drink according to your normal diet, both before and after the treatment.

- You will need to lie on your side or on your back for the treatment to be given. A tube is then placed into your rectum (back passage), and the radiographer may take an X-ray to check it is in the correct position.
- As each patient is different, your treatment is worked out especially for you.
- The tube is then attached to the brachytherapy machine by a guide tube. The radioactive source is made to travel along this tube by remote control.
- The staff will leave the room while the treatment is in progress. However, they will be monitoring you on a TV screen in the control area nearby, and will also be able to talk to you via an intercom.
- At the end of the treatment, the radioactive source is withdrawn back into the machine by remote control, and the medical staff will return to you. The tube is removed and you may then go home. However, we strongly advise you to have a responsible adult to accompany you home.

Are there any side-effects?

You may expect to have a discharge and/or slight bleeding from your rectum for a few days after the treatment and to a minor extent this may go on for a longer period. If the symptoms persist you should consult your family doctor (GP).

Good hygiene around your rectum is very important. You should take a daily bath where possible, gently washing the area. Sometimes, bathing the area with a mild solution of sodium bicarbonate (half teaspoon to a pint of warm water) may be soothing.

If you have any further questions or problems, please do not hesitate to ask the oncologist, nurse or radiographer.

Additional help and support

People who have had cancer will say that throughout their illness, they experienced a range of emotions, expected and unexpected.

Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time, both as individuals and within relationships. Some patients find it harder to make decisions or to face up to things, feeling overwhelmed and unable to focus on positive aspects within their lives.

If you have difficulty making sense of your feelings or can relate to any of these experiences you may find talking it through with a trained counsellor / psychologist helpful.

Counselling aims to provide individuals and families with an opportunity to understand these new experiences in a way that can help them feel more manageable.

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (based at Mount Vernon Hospital) provides counselling and also a range of services including relaxation sessions and complementary therapies.

The Centre also produces a series of helpful hints on various topics including side-effects of radiotherapy. To find out more, either drop in or call the Centre on the number on the back of this leaflet.

This leaflet forms part of a series of publications produced by the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The LJMC is staffed by healthcare professionals and trained volunteers and is part of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

- ◇ Drop-in centre for support and information
- ◇ Telephone Helpline
- ◇ Benefits Advice *
- ◇ Pre-treatment visits
- ◇ Complementary therapies *
- ◇ Relaxation classes
- ◇ Counselling *
- ◇ Support groups
- ◇ Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops

* These services are available to patients under the care of an NHS oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

Contacts

If you have any queries about the information in this leaflet, please contact the:

Brachytherapy Unit: 01923 844636

Radiotherapy Clinic: 01923 844267

Opening hours: Mon - Fri: 9.30am - 1.00pm & 2.00 - 4.30pm

Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre
situated between the Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)
Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN
Telephone Helpline: **01923 844014**
www.ljmc.org