Radiotherapy for secondary (metastatic) brain tumours
Information for patients at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Introduction
Your cancer specialist team have recommended that you have a course of radiotherapy. This leaflet gives information about having radiotherapy at MVCC and should be read with the Macmillan Cancer Support leaflet on ‘Secondary brain tumours’. If anything is unclear or you have further questions please contact one of the team treating you - there are contact telephone numbers at the end of this leaflet.

What is a secondary (metastatic) brain tumour?
The place where a cancer first starts is known as the primary tumour. A secondary tumour happens when cancer cells break away from the primary tumour and travel through the blood system to another part of the body, in this case, the brain. When cancer cells spread to another part of the body they are called secondaries or metastases.

Radiotherapy
Radiotherapy to the brain may be offered to you during your steroid course, to try to shrink the metastases and improve your symptoms. If you have a limited number of brain metastases, your oncologist may discuss with you a more intensive radiotherapy treatment called stereotactic radiotherapy (eg.CyberKnife).

What does radiotherapy involve?
Radiotherapy involves focusing high-energy x-rays on the area of the brain to be treated. Before starting your radiotherapy you will need to attend the hospital for a planning visit. You could be seen by both male and/or female radiographers when you have your radiotherapy planning and treatment. We may need to make a shell for you to wear for your treatment. A shell is like a mask. It is made of thermoplastic (a type of perforated plastic), and will help to keep your head in position during treatment. This shell is made especially for you, to ensure a comfortable fit. Your cancer specialist team will discuss with you how many treatments you will have. Each treatment session lasts around 5-10 minutes.

Does the radiotherapy hurt?
This treatment is completely painless. You won’t feel any sensation.

Will I be radioactive after this treatment?
No, you will not be radioactive. It is perfectly safe for you to be with people (including both children and babies) after your treatment.

Will I have to stay in hospital for this treatment?
Unless there are special reasons why you need to be kept in hospital, you will be an outpatient and will be able to go home after each treatment.

Will this treatment cause side-effects?
The side-effects of radiotherapy to the brain can vary from patient to patient. Here are some of the side-effects that patients having this treatment may experience:

- **Skin reaction**
  Some patients experience a slight skin reaction on the scalp. When washing use a very gentle soap or shampoo.

- **Fatigue**
  Fatigue or excessive tiredness (somnolence) is a very common symptom of radiotherapy to the head. This can happen during treatment and can last for some months after the course of treatment has finished.
• **Headaches and nausea**  
Sometimes radiotherapy to the brain can cause headaches and nausea. Your oncologist will be able to prescribe medication to help relieve any headaches and prevent you from feeling nauseous.

• **Hair loss**  
Hair loss will occur on the area of the head that has been treated. This hair loss will usually happen 2–3 weeks after the start of treatment.

**Will my hair grow back after treatment?**  
Hair loss occurs whenever the head receives radiotherapy. Whether your hair will regrow will depend on the dose you are given. If your hair does grow back, it may be finer than before.

**Can I have a wig?**  
Yes, NHS patients at MVCC are entitled to a free wig. We will refer you to the orthotics department to order a wig. We also have headwear catalogues and a selection of scarves and turbans, available from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

**Other side-effects**  
This list of side-effects is not complete. Other side-effects may occur when specific parts of the brain are treated. Your oncologist will explain about these if they apply to you.

**What happens after treatment has finished?**  
When your radiotherapy has finished, your oncologist or palliative care team will gradually reduce your dose of steroid medication. If you don’t feel well on a lower dose of steroids please inform your doctor or nurse specialist as soon as possible. Avoid stopping steroids suddenly as this can make you feel unwell.

**Are there any other precautions I should take?**  
If you have had, or there is the possibility that you may have a fit or seizure you need to take care when bathing or taking a shower. A shower would be safer, but if you are having a bath keep the water level shallow. If possible try to ensure there is someone with you or near by. You should avoid swimming if you are at risk of having a fit or seizure.

**Is it okay for me to drive?**  
Once you have been diagnosed with brain metastasis you must not drive. The law requires you to inform the Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Association (DVLA) of your diagnosis. Depending on the grade of the tumour, the DVLA will not allow you to drive for 1-2 years. Please be aware that if you drive when a doctor has advised you not to, your insurance will be invalidated, and you may be prosecuted. The hospital will not contact the DVLA, it is your responsibility. You can contact the DVLA by calling 0300 790 6806 or at www.dvla.gov.uk

**Additional help and support**  
The LJMC provides additional support and information for patients and carers on any issue associated with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The Centre offers a range of services including counselling, complementary therapies and relaxation sessions. Please feel free to drop in or call us on the number below.

---

**Contacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy clinic radiographers (Mon - Fri: 9.00am - 5.00pm)</td>
<td>020 3826 2612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment enquiries (ask for your Consultant's secretary)</td>
<td>020 3826 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Transport Services</td>
<td>020 3826 2423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy bookings answerphone</td>
<td>020 3826 2446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre</td>
<td>020 3826 2555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 Hour Acute Oncology Service - Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855