



# Radiotherapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Information for patients at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Welcome to Mount Vernon Cancer Centre. This is a simple guide to planning and receiving radiotherapy. We hope it will answer some of your questions. There are some useful contact numbers on page 4 if you have any questions or concerns.

## Introduction

Your cancer specialist (oncologist) has recommended that your cancer is treated with a course of radiotherapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre (MVCC). This leaflet is part of a series of leaflets about radiotherapy, some of which deal with specific types of treatment to certain parts of the body. You will also be given a leaflet relevant to your treatment.

If you have any further questions before, during or after your treatment, please contact one of the team treating you.

If you have difficulty in remembering everything discussed at your appointments, you may want to record your discussion with the doctor or nurse on a small device (eg smartphone). This may be helpful to you when remembering information later and discussing it with your family or friends. If you would like to do this, please say at the start of the appointment that you will be recording so the staff are aware. They will make a note that the consultation was recorded and who was present, to make it easier if you need to refer to it later. Please be aware that we do not allow video recording.

## Who will be looking after me?

A cancer doctor specialising in radiotherapy is known as a clinical oncologist.

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

You will be seen during your treatment by a clinic review radiographer or nurse. Your oncologist's team is also available to see you, if needed.

The team looking after you during your treatment may also include:

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

## 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, and is given by a machine called a Linear Accelerator (LA).

You could be seen by both male and/or female radiographers when you have your radiotherapy planning and treatment.

External beam radiotherapy:

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

Your radiotherapy 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, Monday to Friday, between 8am - 8pm. Appointment times will be arranged with you for your treatments.

We try to keep to a similar time for most of your scheduled appointments during your course of treatment. However, due to routine maintenance, you may be treated on a different Linear Accelerator (LA) or by different staff on some days. In the event of a Bank Holiday or unavoidable circumstances, your treatment schedule may change.

It is useful to know if you are able to attend between 8am - 9am or 5pm - 8pm, so please tell a member of the radiotherapy team.

We aim to treat you within 30 minutes of your appointment time. However, sometimes for reasons that we cannot control we may run late. We will try to keep you informed of any delays when they arise.

The treatment will take between 5 - 30 minutes and you will be alone in the room during that time. However, the radiographers will be able to see you at all times through closed circuit television. They will also be able to talk with you via an intercom, so if you have a problem, you will be able to call them.

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 try 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.

It is not possible at your planning scan or during your radiotherapy to assess how your treatment is working. This will be assessed after you have finished your treatment during your future follow up appointments.

### **Can I have radiotherapy if I have a heart pacemaker, implantable cardiac device or cochlea implant?**

You must tell your oncologist or radiographer either before or during your planning

appointment if you have a pacemaker, implantable cardiac device (ICD) or cochlea implant (a special implant in your ear). These devices can be affected by radiotherapy so your treatment has to be planned to allow for them.

### **How is my treatment planned?**

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

Please be aware that your planning appointment may take most of the day and will involve having a CT scan to provide precise information for your treatment.

### **Your planning day**

1. When you arrive at the Cancer Centre please check in at the reception desk. The receptionist will ask you to confirm your details.
2. You will be directed to the waiting room where you should wait to be called by a member of staff. Please note that there are several clinics at the same time with patients all waiting in the same area, so you may not be called in the order you arrive.
3. You will be asked to confirm your name, address and date of birth. This is to ensure you have been correctly identified. You will be asked to sign a consent form for treatment and, if relevant, you will also be asked to sign a form to confirm you are not pregnant.
4. The planning will usually take place in a CT planning room.
5. The radiographers will explain in detail what these machines do and what is involved with your planning. If you have any questions, please ask.
6. You will need to remove some clothing. We realise this may make you feel uncomfortable but we will maintain your dignity as much as we are able.
7. You will be asked to lay on the bed in the same position as required for your treatment. Please tell the radiographers if you are uncomfortable as you will need to stay in that position for up to 30 minutes.
8. There may be several people in the room with you. This will include radiographers, doctors

and possibly physicists who will measure and record all the information needed to deliver your treatment accurately.

9. Marks will be placed on your skin using a felt-tip pen, these will wash off. With your permission, the radiographers will make a few tiny permanent marks on the skin (tattoos). These are very small and are done by pinpricking the skin with some special dye. The permanent dots are important as they enable accurate positioning and treatment delivery each day.
10. The staff will be focussing on the technical aspects of your planning and may not be able to talk to you but will keep you informed of what they are doing. If you are finding it difficult to remain still, please tell the radiographers. If you have any questions, please wait until this stage is finished.
11. The planning process may seem impersonal due to its nature. Please feel free to discuss any concerns before or after your planning.
12. 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 scanner. This can be explained to them if you wish.

#### **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 for support, as you will be given detailed information

#### **Your treatment**

After your planning, the appointments for your radiotherapy will be given to you.

When you come for your radiotherapy you will need to book in. At your planning session you will be given a booking-in card. You can use this card at the self check-in machine in the main reception area or if you prefer, you can check in at the main reception desk.

#### **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, and if your oncologist agrees, you may be able to stay at CHART Lodge. This is a hostel on the hospital site near the treatment centre which is available for patients, relatives and friends. There is a charge for staying in CHART Lodge. Please ask one of the team treating you for leaflet about CHART Lodge (PI77).

Hospital transport facilities are very limited and are only available for some patients. Please speak with your treatment team if you need to request transport. For more information see the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) leaflet about Patient Transport Services at MVCC (HHC265).

#### **What about working?**

People react to radiotherapy in different ways. Daily treatment sessions may cause you to feel more tired especially as your treatment continues. This tiredness may make it difficult for you to carry on working. If you feel you wish to carry on working during your entire course of treatment you may do so, if your oncologist agrees.

#### **Finances**

If you work, we advise you to let your employer know 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 LJMC on site at MVCC.

Your specialist nurse will also be able to give you advice and information on Macmillan grants.

#### **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 hospital site and directions on how to get there can be found on the LJMC website: [www.ljmc.org](http://www.ljmc.org) or you can call the LJMC on 020 3826 2555 for a copy. There is also a map of the site on the back page of this leaflet.

## Car parking at the hospital

A Pay & Display parking scheme operates 24 hours a day. Cancer patients have a £1 concessionary parking rate but must register for this. Registration forms are on the back of appointment letters or are available at the Cancer Centre Reception desk.

On your first visit, take your registration form to one of the following offices (Mon - Fri), where you will be given a yellow Concessionary Parking Pass:

- **Facilities Office:** 8am - 4pm
- **Car Parking Office** 8am - 1pm and 2pm - 4pm
- **Post Room:** 8.30am - 12pm and 1pm - 4pm

Get a Concession/Blue Badge ticket for £1 at the Pay and Display machine and display this and your yellow pass on the car dashboard. Your yellow pass can be used in any car.

**Blue badge holders** do not need to register. Pay £1 at the Pay & Display machine. Please display your ticket and blue badge on your dashboard.

## 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 (020 3826 2343) or visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) and search for 'Travel costs'.

## Oak Tree Restaurant

The Oak Tree Restaurant provides a self-service cafeteria, hot meals and snack service. It is open Monday - Friday 7am - 3.30pm

Breakfast: 7am - 10.30am and  
Lunch: 11.30am - 2.00pm

Light meal options are available from the vending machines 7 days a week.

## Coffee Bars

The Comforts Fund runs a coffee bar in the radiotherapy waiting area which provides hot and cold drinks and snacks (Mon - Fri, 10.00am - 4.00pm).

In the Mount Vernon Treatment Centre there is a coffee bar which also sells snacks and other items (Mon - Fri, 8.00am - 5.00pm).

## Other information

At Mount Vernon Cancer Centre there may be students present while you are being examined or treated. Please 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 more information during your radiotherapy. 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' (PI27).

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

- Helpful Hints on various side-effects
- Information on 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 LJMC.

# Contacts

Your oncologist is .....

Your hospital number .....

Your treatment start date .....

Length of your course of treatment .....

Appointment enquiries (ask for your Consultant's secretary) ..... 020 3826 2020

Radiotherapy bookings answerphone ..... 020 3826 2449

Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre ..... 020 3826 2555

**At other times, call the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre 24-hour Emergency Advice Line: 07825 028855**

### 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.

### 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.

To get an exemption certificate, ask your GP for an application form.

### 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.

### Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

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

The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you and include healthcare professionals and trained volunteers. The centre provides a relaxed setting in which to talk and ask questions.

The LJMC is situated between the main Cancer Centre building and Gate 3 (White Hill).

 **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre**  
*... supporting people affected by cancer...*

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- ① Drop-in centre
- ① Telephone helpline
- ① Benefits advice\*
- ① Complementary therapies\*
- ① Relaxation classes
- ① Counselling\*
- ① Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- ① The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- ① Self-help courses

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

Mon-Fri: **9.30am–4.30pm**

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: **www.ljmc.org**

# Mount Vernon Hospital

Mount Vernon Hospital, Rickmansworth Road, Northwood HA6 2RN Satnav users: for Gates 1 and 2 (Rickmansworth Road) use HA6 2RN, for Gate 3 (White Hill) use WD3 1PZ. There is no through road across the hospital site.

