Coming for Radiotherapy
Information for patients
This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your radiotherapy.

It describes radiotherapy planning and treatment and explains the side-effects which you may experience during and after treatment.

It will be given to you in addition to the information you will receive from your clinical oncologist (who is a specialist doctor in cancer treatment). His/her team will be caring for you during your treatment. This team will include radiographers and nurses and possibly include social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapist, dietitians and speech and language therapists.

Each person’s treatment will vary, so the information given is a general guide. The healthcare team looking after you will explain your treatment and the side-effects in detail. If you hear any words or phrases that you do not understand, please ask your doctor or a member of your healthcare team what it means. It does not matter how many times you ask.

Staff will make every effort to meet your individual needs or will direct you to the person who can help.
What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy X-rays and other types of radiation to treat cancer. The organs and tissues of the body are made up of tiny building blocks called cells.

Radiotherapy causes physical and chemical damage to the cancer cells in the treated area. Although normal cells are also affected, they can repair themselves and are able to recover.

Radiotherapy is a local treatment. This means it only affects the part of the body that is treated. You do not feel anything during radiotherapy and you will not be radioactive. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment. You will have your radiotherapy on a treatment machine called a Linear Accelerator as shown here.

Radiotherapy is given by male and female therapy radiographers who are highly trained in the accurate planning and delivery of radiotherapy treatment. You will see your radiographers at each treatment session and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Treatment for each patient is planned individually, and even patients with the same type of cancer may not receive identical treatment. Radiotherapy may be used as your main treatment, or combined with other treatments such as surgery and chemotherapy.
If you would like to visit the radiotherapy department before your treatment starts please call 0113 206 7603 to arrange a time. This visit can be very useful as you can find out more information about radiotherapy. It is a good opportunity to visit the hospital and tour the simulators and treatment areas. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions.

‘I was so pleased to see the machines before my treatment and the staff were so helpful and really put my mind at rest.’

Students

Please be aware that the radiotherapy department is a training centre for radiographers. Male and female students may be present on the treatment units. However, they are supervised at all times. If you do not wish students to be present during your treatment please speak to a member of staff. This will not affect your treatment or care.

Pregnancy

It is advisable that women do not become pregnant while having cancer treatment because the radiotherapy and chemotherapy/ immunotherapy can have an effect on the unborn child. It is suggested that you use a barrier form of contraception (e.g. condoms). For more information see the ‘Contraception and pregnancy during cancer treatment’ leaflet. Please do not hesitate to ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns about these issues.
Planning your treatment

Your first appointment for radiotherapy will be a planning appointment. This will be used to gather all the information we need to accurately plan your treatment. You will be contacted by phone, with an appointment for your radiotherapy planning session. Some tests and scans may be needed to help plan your treatment. We will explain which of these you will need when your appointment is made.

Please eat and drink normally during your treatment unless you are told differently by your hospital team.

You may see your clinical oncologist (or a member of their team) at this appointment. This is an ideal opportunity for you to ask questions. If you wish to go ahead with the treatment and you have not consented for your radiotherapy treatment in another hospital, this will be completed at this visit. You will be asked to sign a form giving your consent to treatment.

What to bring with you

- A list of all questions you may have.
- An up-to-date list of all the medications you are taking (including inhalers, sprays, vitamins or herbal products).
- Any medication that you may need during your visit.
- If you have a stoma, please bring a spare bag and your changing equipment with you.
- Something to eat and drink.
- Something to occupy yourself with as this first visit can be quite lengthy (up to two hours).
Mould Room

Radiotherapy involves exact positioning of the radiation beam, so you will need to stay very still while you are having treatment. The best way to help you keep still depends on which part of your body is to be treated. To help you stay still when treating the neck, chest or armpit areas, we may make a mask for your head and shoulders. You will be given an appointment to attend Mould Room where the masks are made. If you are having treatment to a different part of your body a mask is not needed. If you have any concerns about the mask, please let your clinical oncologist or a member of their team know. We have a support team who will help you. There is a leaflet available. If you would like a copy please ask your consultant or contact the radiotherapy information lounge on 0113 206 7603.

Your planning scan

In order to plan your treatment you will have a CT scan. This is done on a machine called a CT Simulator, shown here in the photograph. This is a CT scanner that allows the images to be sent to the radiotherapy computer planning system. There will be several members of staff present at your scan. These may include therapy radiographers, a mould room technician and a dosimetrist (the person who will produce the computer plan for your treatment).
Contrast (dye)

A special contrast agent, often called a dye, may be used for your scan to make specific organs, blood vessels and/or tissue types ‘stand out’. This can make it easier for the doctor to plan your treatment.

The contrast dye is given by inserting a small needle into your vein to inject it into your bloodstream. You should tell the radiographer if you have any allergies, but they will go over this before they use any dye.

The most common side-effects of the dye are:

- A warm or hot “flushed” sensation during the injection.
- A ‘metallic’ taste in the mouth, which usually lasts less than a minute or so.
- You may also feel as if you have passed urine however this will pass very quickly and it should cause no ill effects.

There is a slight risk of an allergic reaction to the injection, such as a skin rash, but it may lead to other significant complications. The doctors in the radiotherapy department are trained to deal with any complications and again the risk involved is very small. You will be able to drive your car or go to work after your scan. The radiographers will advise you about drinking plenty of fluids after your injection.

The scan will be taken with you lying in the same position as for your treatment. The radiographers will draw some marks onto your skin, to be used as a reference for your treatment. You will then be scanned, which will only take a few minutes and at the end of the scan these marks will be replaced by permanent marks.
These marks are no bigger than a freckle and will be used each day for your treatment.

These permanent marks help us to reproduce your treatment with accuracy each day. It also means that you can wash without worrying about your marks coming off.

Following the scan you will receive the times of your first appointments on the treatment machine, this may be in a few days or weeks’ time. The radiographers will talk to you about any further appointments you have.

Having your treatment

When you arrive for your treatment you should go to the main reception of the radiotherapy department. You will be given directions to your treatment machine. The radiographers will explain what will happen and answer any questions that you may have. The number of treatments you will be having will be confirmed and you will be given a list with all the appointments you need.

Treatment is normally given daily, Monday to Friday, however your treatment may not start on a Monday. Whenever possible you will be treated at the time of day that suits you, but this cannot always be arranged or guaranteed. However there may be occasions when you may have a longer stay in the department or be asked to attend at a different time, e.g. to see your oncologist.
Although you have the small permanent marks on your skin, the radiographers may need to draw around them each time you come for treatment. This is part of the quality checking procedure for your treatment. If you have pen marks on your skin you may prefer to wear older clothing as the marks may discolour fabric. It is advisable to wear loose clothing around the treated area.

A linear accelerator radiotherapy machine

Your first appointment may not include treatment but will include x-rays to make sure you are in the correct position for treatment. Treatment times vary from 5-20 minutes each day depending on the type of treatment you are having. The treatment machine is only switched on for a fraction of this time. For most of the time the radiographers are carefully placing you and the machine in the correct position for your treatment. The machine will move around you but does not touch you. A team of radiographers work together in the treatment room; you will hear them giving each other instructions and checking your treatment.
Once you are in the correct position the radiographers will leave the room to switch on the machine.

You will only be alone for a few minutes at a time. The radiographers will be watching you on a closed circuit TV monitor as shown here in the picture. There is also an intercom system so the radiographers can talk to you.

Although you have to lie still, you can breathe normally during your treatment. The machine stops automatically after your prescribed dose of treatment has been given. The machine can also be stopped at any time if needed. The treatment machines make a buzzing sound when they are switched on. You do not feel anything.

During the treatment course, please tell the radiographers how you are feeling. If you have any problems or questions, please let them know. A member of the radiotherapy team may see you in the review clinic (Princess Royal Suite) to see how you are getting on. They will also monitor any side-effects you may be experiencing. You can expect to be in the department longer than usual on this day.

Some days the Radiotherapy Department may be very busy and your appointment time may be delayed. We will keep you informed of any delays, please see the information in the waiting areas.
Your appointments for Radiotherapy may not be all at the same time each day and are subject to change. It is also possible that during your course of treatment you may miss a day’s treatment due to machine maintenance or bank holidays. It is therefore important to speak to a health care professional before booking a holiday immediately following your radiotherapy.

For appointment queries please telephone the Radiotherapy Reception Desk on 0113 206 8940 for further advice.

Research at Leeds Cancer Centre
Leeds Cancer Centre is a major centre for cancer research. You may be asked if you would like to take part in clinical studies or trials linked to your condition. You do not have to take part in any trials, unless you wish to do so. Your treatment will not be affected in any way if you do not wish to take part in a trial. If you do take part in a clinical trial you may meet a research nurse or radiographer who will be helping to run the trial.
Side-effects

Radiotherapy only affects the area that is to be treated. For example hair loss will *not* occur unless there is hair in the treated area. There are booklets available in the Information Lounge (see page 17) about the specific side-effects for the area of the body where you are being treated. Your doctor, radiographers and nurses will advise you about the side-effects that may occur.

Side-effects do not appear suddenly, but develop over a period of time. Your side-effects may get worse 5-21 days after your treatment has finished and then will slowly settle over the following few weeks.

Skin reaction

Radiotherapy can make the skin where you are having your treatment change colour or feel warm and itchy. Before you go in for your treatment the radiographer will explain what will happen to your skin and how to look after it. They will also give you a leaflet to take home. The same will happen at the end of your treatment.

If you are concerned about your skin reaction please talk to your radiographers or contact the radiotherapy nurses in Princess Royal Suite on 0113 206 7587.

Tiredness (fatigue)

Radiotherapy can make you feel more tired than usual, especially if you have to travel a long way for treatment each day. Fatigue usually improves between six months to a year after treatment.
Some people find that fatigue can last longer, up to two years or more.

**There are things you can do to help yourself:**

- Gentle exercise can help reduce the symptoms of fatigue.
- Having enough to drink can prevent tiredness from dehydration.
- Small meals or snacks eaten more often than three times a day may be easier to face.
- Try to get a good night’s sleep where possible, a daytime nap may help.
- Try to ‘pace’ yourself, listen to what your body is telling you, rest if you need to.
- Pick out the things that you enjoy, and try to accept help for some other tasks.
- Little and often is the rule of thumb.

There is a Macmillan information leaflet available *‘Coping with fatigue’*. If you would like a copy, or support with your fatigue please ask a member of staff.

**Loss of appetite**

Your appetite may vary during your treatment. Try to eat well during your treatment and also drink about two litres of fluid each day. There is a leaflet available *‘Eating well during your treatment’*, please ask a member of staff if you would like a copy.
When radiotherapy has finished

Your side-effects may get worse in the first few weeks after treatment and will then gradually settle. You should start getting back to normal about 4-6 weeks after treatment but it may take a little longer. Tiredness can last for several months and you may need to continue to rest more than usual.

You may be asked to attend the hospital where you were first seen by your oncologist for follow-up checks at regular intervals. This will vary according to the area you have had treated. Please discuss this with your doctor if you have any concerns.

Planning a return to work

If you find that you are tired after your treatment has ended you may consider taking a break from work or working part-time. It can be useful to talk to your employer about returning to work gradually, i.e. shorter or fewer days at first. Your GP can recommend this on your fitness to work note. The Macmillan booklet ‘Work and Cancer’, offers help and advice on all areas of work during your cancer treatment.

Holidays

The Information Lounge has travel information which includes a list of companies who offer travel insurance for patients.

Vaccinations or flu jabs

Please ask your consultant for the latest advice on having vaccinations or flu jabs.
Leisure or physical activities
Whatever physical activities you wish to take part in, remember to start slowly and build up the amount of exercise gradually.

Benefits and financial help
All patients with cancer are able to receive free prescriptions. Ask for a FPG2A claim form from your GP or the hospital.

Help with travel costs to and from hospital
*If you are in receipt of Income Support / Income Based Employment Support Allowance / Working Tax Credit / Guarantee Pension Credit, you can claim:*
- The cost of travelling by public transport.
- Petrol costs if travelling by car.
- Taxi fares in certain circumstances.

*To get a refund for travel costs at the hospital, you will need to:*
- Show proof of your current entitlement to one of the listed benefits.
- Produce your bus/train tickets or give your car mileage.
- You also need written proof from the department that you attended for treatment on the days you are claiming for.

To check if you are eligible because of low income please complete form HC1 available from the Information Lounge in the radiotherapy department and forward it to the Health Benefits Division, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1AA.
Talking to children

You may need to talk to your children about your treatment and may not know where to begin. Talk to your doctor or visit the Information Lounge for written information. Macmillan Cancer Support have produced a booklet, which will help you explain what cancer is and how it may be treated.

You can also call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 for information and advice.

How you talk about your cancer will depend on the ages of your children. Older children may want to know if cancer is hereditary. The answer is almost always ‘no’. If you are worried about this ask your doctor.
Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support complements care provided by your clinical team. We offer access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for you, your family and friends.

We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

The Centre is on the St James’s Hospital site and offers a variety of support services including counselling, support groups and complementary therapies. These therapies include Reiki, relaxation and visualisation, hand and foot massage and many others. You can just drop in for a coffee and a chat anytime. Open from 10am - 4pm Monday to Friday.

Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department

Open from 8.30am - 6.00pm Tel: (0113) 206 7603

Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department

Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 8816

Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 6498

All the above services can be emailed on: leedsth-tr.Cancersupport@nhs.net
Useful organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support
Freephone 0808 808 00 00, 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday
A textphone service is available for deaf and hard of hearing people on 108001 0808 808 0000.
website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Jayne Garforth Support Centre
The Macmillan Unit, The Calderdale Royal Hospital
Salterhebble, Halifax HX3 0PW
Tel: 0142 222 2709 9am-4pm daily, but is not always manned by the manager during this time.

York Cancer Care Centre
York Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Wigginton Road, York YO31 8HE
Tel: 0190 472 1166      Email: jane.archer@york.nhs.uk

Cancer Support Bradford & Airedale
Daisy House Farm, 44 Smith Lane, Bradford BD9 6DA
Mon - Fri. 9am-5pm Tel: 0127 477 6688
website: www.bradfordcancersupport.org.uk
email: support@bradfordcancersupport.org.uk

The Haven (Breast Cancer)
Tel: 0113 284 7829    www.breastcancerhaven.org.uk

Breast Cancer Care
Tel: 0808 800 6000    www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Bowel Cancer
Tel: 0207 381 9711    www.bowelcancer.org.uk
British Colostomy Association
Tel: 0118 939 1537    www.colostomyuk.org

The Carers Centre (Leeds)
Tel: 0113 380 4300    www.carersleeds.org.uk

Ovacome (Ovarian Cancer Support)
Tel: 0800 008 7054    www.ovacome.org.uk

Roy Castle Lung Foundation
Tel: 0333 323 7200    www.roycastle.org

Prostate Cancer
Tel: 0800 082 1616    www.prostatecanceruk.org

Cancer Research UK
Tel: 0300 123 1022    www.cancerresearchuk.org

Car Parking
When you are coming for radiotherapy planning and treatment your parking is free in the on-site multistorey car park. Please ask for more information at the radiotherapy main reception desk.

Refreshments
There is a restaurant and coffee shop available on Level 0, which are open daily. They serve drinks, light snacks and hot meals. Vending machines are also available in the main radiotherapy waiting room and Level 0. There is also a shop on Level 0 with books, papers and snacks.
Hotel Bexley Wing

The hotel is located on the 8th floor of Bexley Wing and offers single and double rooms each with an en-suite, tea and coffee making facilities and digital television. Single rooms with wheelchair access are also available.

Patients are able to stay free of charge. There is a charge for relatives if they are staying in their own room.

For further details please contact the Hotel Co-ordinator on 0113 206 7687.

Out of hours please contact the Non-surgical Oncology Nurse Practitioner through main switchboard on 0113 243 3144.