Radiotherapy to the male pelvis (urological cancers)

Information for patients
This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your cancer treatment.

It will be given to you in addition to the information you will receive from your doctor who is a clinical oncologist, a specialist in radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Their team will be caring for you during your treatment. This team will include radiographers and nurses.

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

Please do not bring valuables into the hospital with you as the trust cannot accept liability for loss or theft.

All your radiotherapy planning and treatment will take place in the Radiotherapy Department on Level -2, Bexley Wing, Leeds Cancer Centre (LS9 7TF).
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 being treated. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

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.’
Radiotherapy is given by male and female radiographers. You will see your radiographers at each treatment session and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Students**

The radiotherapy department is a training centre for radiographers. Both male and female students may be present on the treatment units. 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.

**Planning your treatment**

In the planning clinic you will see your clinical oncologist or a member of his/her team where they will discuss your treatment with you. You will be asked to sign a form giving your consent to treatment if you have not already done so.

**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;
- something to eat and drink and something to occupy yourself with, as this first visit can be quite lengthy (up to two hours).
Your planning CT scan

In order to plan your treatment you will have a planning CT scan. This is done on a CT Simulator shown here in the photograph.

This allows the images to be sent to the radiotherapy computer planning system. The scan will only take a few minutes, and it is important for you to stay as still as you can.

This scan is not used for diagnostic purposes and will not be reported on as such.

The scan will be taken with you lying in the same position as you will be in for your treatment. The radiographers will draw four marks onto your skin, to be used as a reference for your treatment. These marks will then be replaced by a small permanent tattoos.

You may need to have an empty bladder or rectum (back passage) for your planning scan and subsequent treatment. You will be given specific advice and a further information leaflet if this is required. The radiographers will explain everything to you before your scan.

Please note you do not need to come into hospital with a full bladder.

Sometimes an intravenous contrast dye is needed and is given through a small needle (cannula) in your arm.
Contrast side-effects
You may notice a warm feeling throughout your body and have a metallic taste in your mouth. You may also feel as if you have passed urine. This will pass very quickly. There is a slight risk of an allergic reaction to the injection, such as a skin rash, but very rarely may lead to other complications. The staff in the radiotherapy department are highly trained to manage any complications and the risk involved is very small. You will be able to drive your car or go to work after your scan.

The radiographers will mark the treatment area with black ink and a tiny pinprick using a sterile needle. This leaves a permanent mark no bigger than a freckle. These marks are used to help the radiographers to accurately position you each day for your treatment.

Following CT planning you will receive the times of your first five treatment appointments, which usually starts two to three weeks after your planning scan. The radiographers will talk to you about any further appointments you have.

Having your treatment
Before your treatment the radiographers will explain the whole procedure and ask you a list of questions. They would like you to ask any questions you have and express any concerns. They will be able to help you or find someone who can.
You will have your radiotherapy on a machine called a Linear Accelerator (shown here in the photograph).

A team of radiographers work together in the treatment room; you will hear them giving each other instructions and information relating to your treatment.

At each treatment session, the radiographers will help position you correctly. They move the couch and the machine to accurately direct the treatment at your pelvis; however the machine does not actually touch you. Again it is important for you to stay as still as possible but breathe normally. 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. The CCTV camera is not recording or saving any images.
There is also an intercom system so the radiographers can talk to you. Treatment only takes a few minutes. The treatment machines make a buzzing noise when switched on. This is the only way that you will know that the machine is on. You will not feel anything.

A course of treatment may last up to seven weeks and it is given once a day Monday to Friday, with a rest at the weekend.

You may need to have an empty bladder or rectum (back passage) for your treatment. You will be given a leaflet with instructions if this is needed. Please ask the radiographers if you are worried about this.

During your treatment we recommend you drink about two litres of fluid each day. This is the same as 3½ pints or about eight glasses.

*If you have a kidney problem and drinking this amount of fluid would be difficult for you please tell your radiographer, nurse or doctor.*

**Patient Alert System (PAS)**

As you have to keep still there is a hand held button to press if you need the staff to come in during treatment. If you would like to use the PAS at any time during treatment, please speak to your radiographers.
The treatment only takes a few minutes but you will be in the treatment room for about 10-20 minutes. The machine stops automatically after your prescribed dose of treatment has been given. The radiographers can stop the machine at any time if needed. The treatment machine makes a buzzing sound when switched on. You do not feel anything. The radiographers may need to come in and out part way through each treatment.

During the treatment course, please tell the radiographers how you are feeling. If you have any problems or questions, please let them know. Your clinical oncologist, or a member of their team will see you in the radiotherapy review clinic during your treatment. They will 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.

Your appointments for radiotherapy may not be at the same time each day and are subject to change. It is also possible that a day’s treatment may need rescheduling, due to planned machine maintenance or bank holidays. Please avoid booking a holiday straight after your radiotherapy.

Please telephone the Radiotherapy Reception Desk on: 0113 206 8940 for further advice.
Side-effects of treatment

Side-effects can be divided into short term (acute) effects that happen during or soon after your treatment, and long term side-effects occurring months or years later. Some side-effects are common, whilst others are rare. As your treatment progresses you may experience some side-effects, however, not everyone will experience all of these. If you do experience any of the following side-effects, do not worry, they are normal reactions to treatment and are temporary.

Side-effects usually begin about halfway through the course of treatment, may last for several weeks after it has finished and then slowly settle down. Please tell us how you are feeling, particularly if your symptoms get worse, so that we can advise and treat you.

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 ask for help with daily 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.

**Skin reaction**

The skin in the treated area starts to redden or darken usually from the second week of treatment. It may become dry and itchy. Sometimes later in treatment it may peel and become weepy. This is normal and will heal over a few weeks. If you feel you must shave in the treatment area only use an electric razor with extreme care. 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 nurses in the Review Clinic on 0113 206 7587.

**Hair loss**

Radiotherapy will make your hair fall out in the area being treated. Other areas are not affected. Usually the hair grows back after a few weeks of completing radiotherapy, but in some people this can be permanent.
Urinary problems
Radiotherapy can cause inflammation to the lining of the bladder.

You may experience any of the following:
• need to pass urine often - called frequency;
• burning sensation on passing urine - called cystitis;
• you have the feeling that you cannot wait to empty your bladder - called urgency;
• blood in the urine - called haematuria.

Please let the doctor or radiographers know if you develop any of these symptoms. You may need a urine test to make sure that you do not have an infection. You may need medication such as pain killers or antibiotics to help these symptoms. You are advised to avoid coffee (caffeine) and alcohol. You should drink plenty of clear fluids. Some people find drinking (sugar free) cranberry juice can be helpful for their urinary symptoms, however, some fruit juices might interfere with the way some medicines work so please discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist before starting to drink cranberry juice.

You may find that you have mild incontinence for a few months after the treatment, however this is rare.

Changes in bowel habits
Radiotherapy may cause inflammation and irritation of the bowel. This may cause watery diarrhoea and cramping pains in your abdomen. If you already have diarrhoea, it can make the problems worse.
You may experience frequent, loose bowel motions or diarrhoea. Your specialist doctor will give you advice and may prescribe anti-diarrhoea medicines (such as Loperamide) to help control it. Drugs to reduce cramps (antispasmodics or muscle relaxants) can also be prescribed. It is helpful to drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost through diarrhoea.

Radiotherapy to the large bowel can make you feel that you have to open your bowels. This can be controlled with steroid suppositories or ointments which also contain an anaesthetic (such as Proctosedyl). Anti-constipation medicines may also help. Occasionally, the radiotherapy may cause some bleeding from the back passage. If you notice any bleeding, let your doctor know.

Radiotherapy may change the way the muscles in your bowels work. After you have opened your bowels, your muscles may continue to contract. This makes it feel as if something is left behind. This feeling is called tenesmus. If you find you are having this problem please speak to your clinical nurse specialist for advice.

**Wind/gas from the bowel**
After radiotherapy you may pass wind more often and have less control of when this happens.

*There can be many reasons for this:*
- eating too many vegetables;
- food containing starch and dietary fibre;
- some medication used to regulate bowel habits.
Foods that may cause wind include:
- pulses (such as peas, beans and lentils);
- vegetables from the brassica family (such as brussel sprouts, cabbage and artichokes);
- onions;
- high-fibre food such as bran;
- fizzy drinks.

If you are finding excess wind a problem please speak to your clinical nurse specialist.

Abdominal pain (colic)
Occasionally you may experience some abdominal discomfort and colicky pains, or you may feel bloated. If you experience any of the above, tell the radiographer before treatment as you may need to be examined by a doctor.

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 for a copy.

When radiotherapy has finished
Any of the side-effects that you experience, will gradually settle. You should start getting back to normal after about 4-6 weeks but it can take longer. Tiredness sometimes persists for several months and you may need to continue to rest more than usual. You will be given an appointment to see the doctor about six weeks after the treatment is finished.
Long term side-effects
Severe long term side-effects of radiotherapy are uncommon due to careful planning of your treatment. It is unlikely that you will experience all of these but it is useful to know what may occur.

Insufficiency fractures
Radiotherapy can cause small hairline fractures to your pelvic bone. These are called pelvic insufficiency fractures and can be quite painful but this can be controlled with pain killers.

Impotence
For men who are sexually active there is some risk that radiotherapy can make it difficult to get an erection (impotence).

If this happens it will be some months after your treatment has finished. If this is a problem for you then you should discuss this with your clinical oncologist or urologist as there are new treatments which may help. You may find your ejaculate (semen) is of smaller volumes or dry.

Infertility
Radiotherapy to the male pelvis is likely to cause infertility, which means you would no longer be able to father a child. Sperm banking may be an option you want to consider, if so you may wish to discuss this further with your doctor or nurse. It is advisable to use contraception when resuming sexual activity in case you remain fertile. Your sperm count can be checked if you prefer not to use contraception but do not wish to father a child.
Risk of further cancer
Radiation treatment can cause a separate cancer to develop in the years after treatment. These cancers most commonly occur in the organs next to the area being treated. At 10 and more years after treatment the risk of developing a second cancer is approx. 1-2% (a cancer will develop in 1-2 men out of a 100). This is more of an issue for men aged under 65 years.

Lymphoedema
When radiotherapy is given to the lymph glands in your pelvis it can cause some swelling of the legs. This is known as lymphoedema. Your clinical oncologist or nurse specialist will be able to explain this to you in more detail.

There may be long term bladder or bowel problems following radiotherapy.

Macmillan toilet card
If you want to go to the toilet more often, or feel that you cannot wait when you do want to go, you can get a card to show to staff in shops, pubs and other places. The card allows you to use their toilet without them asking awkward questions.

You can get the cards from your radiographer or information lounge in the department.

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/incontinence/Documents/toilet.pdf

Incontinence pads can be provided by your GP.
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. If you do not wish to take part in a trial your treatment will not be affected in any way. If you do take part in a clinical trial you may meet a research nurse or radiographer, helping to run the trial.

Useful organisations and contact numbers

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.

Information Lounge Level 1 Outpatients Department
Open from 10am - 4pm. Tel: (0113) 206 8816

Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department
Open from 8.30am-6.00pm Tel: (0113) 206 7603

Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre
Open from 10am - 4pm. Tel: (0113) 206 6498

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

Prostate Cancer
Tel: 0800 0748 383
www.prostatecancer.org.uk

Lymphoedema Support Network
Tel: 0207 351 4480
www.lymphoedema.org/lsn

College of Sexual Relationship Therapists
You can contact this organisation if you have sexual problems as a result of cancer. Lists of therapists are displayed on their website.

Tel: 02085 432 707
www.cosrt.org.uk

Relate
Gives advice, relationship counselling, sex therapy, workshops, meditation, consultations and support. You can choose to meet them face to face or via their website.

Tel: 0300 100 1234
www.relate.org.uk
Car Parking
When you are coming for radiotherapy planning and treatment your car parking is free. Please ask for more information at the radiotherapy main reception desk.

Refreshments
A restaurant is available serving drinks, light snacks and hot meals. There is also a Café for hot drinks and light snacks; both these are on Level 0. Vending machines are also available on Level -2, Level 0 and Level 1. 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 more information please call 0113 206 7687.