This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your internal radiotherapy (brachytherapy) for gynaecological cancer.

The treatment is given in the Brachytherapy Department, Rutherford Suite, Level -1 Bexley Wing. Brachytherapy uses a radioactive source. The source is placed close to the vaginal walls or near to the scar area in the vagina following surgery. The treatment area receives a high dose of radiation whilst the dose to surrounding normal tissue is lower.

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.

Vaginal vault treatment

A hollow cylinder called a vaginal cylinder, an example of one of these is shown in the picture below. It is inserted with the rounded end first, into the vagina. The cylinder is held in place by a small clamp, which does not touch you. The treatment is given as an outpatient and does not require an anaesthetic. It is used mainly in the treatment of cancer of the endometrium (the lining of the uterus or womb) or vagina.
Will this be the only treatment I receive?
This treatment is sometimes given after external beam radiotherapy but can be used as the only treatment.

What does the treatment involve?
Brachytherapy treatment is usually given in 3-6 treatments (fractions) daily, Monday to Friday. In some cases we give this treatment twice a week. Whenever possible you will be treated at the time of day that suits you, but this cannot always be arranged or guaranteed. 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.

If you are having external radiotherapy there may be a gap of a few days after finishing that treatment before you start your brachytherapy. The brachytherapy radiographers will arrange a time to meet you during your external radiotherapy to explain your brachytherapy treatment to you.

If you are only having brachytherapy, you will usually have six daily treatments. The doctor will discuss this with you at your clinic appointment.

You will see the doctor before starting your brachytherapy. You will be examined internally to decide which size cylinder to be used. On the first day of treatment the radiographer will place the cylinder in your vagina. There is no need to perform any further internal examinations during the treatment. Lubricating jelly will be used to make the examination and cylinder placement as comfortable as possible.

In some cases we may perform a CT or MRI scan with the tube in place. Your treatment may start a few days after this.
During the treatment

A radiographer will show you to a changing room. You will be given a gown and asked to remove your clothes from the waist down. Your clothes and valuables can be locked away in a locker. You will keep the locker key with you until the treatment has finished.

You will be lying comfortably on a soft couch, whilst the treatment is taking place, shown in the photograph above. The cylinder is connected to the treatment machine using a hollow flexible cable. You may experience a little discomfort because you have a cylinder in the vagina. The cylinder is held in place with a small clamp which rests on the treatment couch. The muscles in the vagina may try to push the cylinder out, this sensation is perfectly normal.

Whilst the treatment is being given, you will be in the room alone but the brachytherapy radiographers will monitor you using a closed circuit TV. There is also a two-way intercom.
system so the radiographers can talk to you and you can talk to them. There is also a radio and CD player, which you can listen to during your treatment.

When the machine is switched on, a radioactive pellet travels up the cylinder and gives the prescribed amount of radiotherapy to the vagina and then returns to the machine. The treatment itself is painless but you may notice a slight vibration as the pellet moves through the cylinder. This treatment will only take a few minutes.

**After the treatment**

The radiographer removes the cylinder and you can wipe away any excess lubricating jelly. There is a sink to wash your hands in the room. You will be taken back to the changing room, where you can get dressed and go home.

**Side-effects**

This treatment may cause slight bleeding but other symptoms are unusual. If you have also had external beam radiotherapy you may already be having some diarrhoea or cystitis but this should not get any worse. If this is your only treatment, the side-effects should be minimal but may occur up to two weeks after treatment.

The side-effects you may experience are loose or more frequent bowel movements and a burning pain on passing water. Drinking plenty of fluids can help to reduce this.

If these do not pass quickly or become severe, please contact our service (telephone number on the next page) for further advice.
Radiotherapy may cause dryness, loss of elasticity and narrowing of the vagina. You may be able to help to reduce this by using a vaginal dilator after treatment has finished. The brachytherapy radiographer will discuss this further during your treatment. There is also a leaflet ‘Feminine care after pelvic radiotherapy’ to explain how to use the dilators.

**When will I see the doctor again?**

The doctor will want to see you about 6-8 weeks after the treatment has finished. An appointment will be posted to you.

**Student radiographers**

Please be aware that the radiotherapy department is a training centre for radiographers. Both 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.

**Contact numbers**

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<th>Brachytherapy Radiographers</th>
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<td><strong>0113 206 7744</strong> Monday to Friday 8.00am - 6.00pm</td>
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Support Services

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 complementary and supportive therapies. These therapies include Reiki, relaxation and visualisation, hand and foot massage and many others. We also offer a weekly exercise class and a monthly support group. You can just drop in for a coffee and a chat anytime.

Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department
Open from 8.00am - 6.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 7603

Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department
Open from 9.00am - 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
National Support Organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support

Freephone: 0808 808 0000, 8.00am to 8.00pm seven days a week. A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people is also available. Textphone: 18001 0808 808 0000
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

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Your views matter

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We also invest in prevention to enable people to live healthy and more active lives; delivering healthier futures for us all.

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