Radiotherapy for skin lesions
Information for patients
This leaflet aims to help you understand more about radiotherapy to your skin and the side-effects that you may have 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 any valuables into hospital with you as the Trust cannot accept liability for loss or theft.*

**What is radiotherapy and how does it work?**

Radiotherapy is the use of 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 affected, they can repair themselves and are able to recover.

When you are having your radiotherapy you do not feel anything and it does not make you radioactive. You may hear a buzzing noise when the machine is switched on. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.
Who may I meet in the radiotherapy department?

**Clinical Oncologist**
This is a consultant who is a specialist in radiotherapy. They are responsible for prescribing and overseeing your treatment. You will see your consultant, or a member of their team, when your treatment is being planned. You may see them during your treatment as well.

**Radiographers**
Radiotherapy is given by both 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.

**Students**
Please be aware that the radiotherapy department is a training centre for both male and female radiographers. 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.

If you would like to visit the department before your treatment, to meet the staff and see a radiotherapy machine please tel: 0113 206 7603. We are always happy to help.

“I was so pleased to see the machines before my treatment and the staff were so helpful and really put my mind at rest”
Mould room technologists

If you need a mask making the staff in mould room will carefully guide you through the process. There is a leaflet available.

Patient support staff

If you have any concerns about having a mask please ask to see one of the patient support staff who can help you through the process

Planning your treatment

Your first appointment for radiotherapy will be to see your Clinical Oncologist in the Princess Royal Suite (Planning Clinic). The oncologist will explain your treatment and ask you to sign a consent form to say that you agree to treatment. Please do not wear make-up to cover the area when coming for your planning appointment. The oncologist needs to see the area to be treated clearly.

The area to be treated will be drawn around using a skin marker pen. These marks will be removed before you leave the department. A photograph and a template of the treatment area will be taken and used by the radiographers for each treatment. The template may be used to make an individual protective shield that outlines the treatment area.
Mould room
You may need to visit the Mould Room to have a perspex shell or wax mould made (shown here in the picture). If you have a mask made, you will need to wear the mask for treatment. This helps you stay in the right position.

You may need one or two visits to have your mask made. These appointments are usually a week apart. Please ask for the ‘Having a radiotherapy mask made’ information leaflet.

You may also need customised lead shielding to protect healthy parts of your face, such as your eyes; depending on the area that is being treated. Some patients may need “bolus” applied to their skin. This is a jelly-like material that helps in radiotherapy delivery.

If you require lead shielding or wax or bolus these will be applied during your treatment and removed before you leave the department.

Having your treatment
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. Treatment will take about twenty to thirty minutes each day. There may be occasions when you may have a longer stay in the department or be asked to attend at a different time, for example to see your oncologist.
Your Clinical Oncologist will prescribe your radiotherapy. It may be a single treatment or a course of treatment, which will last between one and four weeks.

When you arrive for your treatment please report to the radiotherapy main reception, you will be shown to your waiting area.

Your electron radiotherapy is given using a linear accelerator, shown in the photograph on the next page.

The radiographers will have a chat with you before treatment to explain what to expect in the treatment room, give you all your appointments and answer any questions you may have. The radiographers will carefully position the machine to give you your treatment. The machine applicator may touch you but will not press on you and it should not be uncomfortable.

Once you are in the correct position, the radiographers will leave the room to switch on the machine. Treatment only takes a few minutes. The treatment machine makes a high pitched noise when switched on and this is the only way that
you know that the machine is on. You will not feel anything else. Although you have to lie still, you can breathe normally during your treatment.

The treatment marks and any individual protective shielding will be checked. If the treatment is close to your eye, or involving your eyelid, you may need to wear a protective contact shield during treatment. This will be inserted after a local anaesthetic to the eye (a couple of anaesthetic drops are administered). Your eye will need to be covered for two hours after the treatment and so driving yourself to hospital should be avoided if you need to wear this type of eye shield.

You will only be alone for a few minutes and the radiographers will be watching you on a closed circuit TV monitor. There is also an intercom system so that radiographers can talk to you. If for any reason you need the radiographers, raise your hand or use the Patient Alert System and they will interrupt the treatment and come in immediately. The treatment machine stops automatically after your prescribed dose of treatment.
Patient Alert System (PAS):

Each radiotherapy treatment room is fitted with an alert system. The controller, shown below, can be held during treatment, and the button pressed at any time to signal to the radiographers that you need assistance. A beacon in the control room will instantly turn from green to red signalling the staff to re-enter the room.

If you would like to use the PAS at any time during treatment, please speak to your radiographers.

Do not try to sit up and get off the treatment couch until the radiographer says it is safe to do so.

When you are having your radiotherapy you do not feel anything and it does not make you radioactive. You may hear a buzzing noise when the machine is switched on. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

As soon as the treatment is completed you will be able to go home.

During the course of treatment please ask the radiographers if you have any problems or questions.

We try to keep as close to appointment times as possible, but on occasions the department is very busy. We will try and keep you informed of any delays.
The end of your treatment?

On your final treatment day the radiographers will talk to you again about side-effects and after care. You may also see a nurse on this visit to arrange for a district nurse to visit you at home.

Side-effects

Skin reaction

• Your skin may feel warm or more sensitive after the treatment and be red and itchy.

• If the skin begins to peel or weep, the radiographers and nurses may provide special dressings.

• Usually the reaction starts towards the end of the treatment course and can last for four to six weeks after treatment has finished.

• The treatment area may form a scab. The scab may form and fall off a few times before it heals. When the skin has fully healed the scab will fall off and leave new skin underneath.

• The treatment area may get worse before it gets better. The reaction is usually at its worst seven to ten days after finishing your treatment. These changes gradually fade with time after your treatment has finished.

• The skin in the treated area will always be more sensitive, thinner and paler.

• Hair in the treatment area may fall out and will not usually re-grow.

See the Skin Care leaflet for how to look after your skin.
General information

Car parking
When you are coming for radiotherapy planning and treatment your car parking is free. On entering the car park take a ticket and park as usual; disabled parking spaces are on Level 0. When exiting, use the left hand lane next to the ticket office. Take your parking ticket and appointment letter to the attendant. They will process your ticket so that when you insert it at the barrier no charge will be made. If you need assistance or are unable to leave your car, please press the button on the barrier.

Help and support

Leeds Cancer Support
The Leeds Cancer Support Service in Bexley Wing is here to help you and your family. We aim to offer high quality information, advice and support, to patients, families and friends.

We have a large selection of information leaflets, Macmillan Cancer Support booklets and fact-sheets. We also have visual and audio aids and assisted internet access for patients and visitors. Please come and browse or just drop in for a chat.

The information lounges are situated on:
Level -2 Radiotherapy Department
Open from 8.30am to 6.00pm Monday - Friday
Tel: 0113 206 7603
Level 1 Information Centre, Outpatients Department

Open from 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday
Tel: 0113 206 8816

The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre
The centre provides an environment where patients and their families can drop in for a drink, take some time out, or just a chat.

We also offer 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.

Contact:

The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre, St James’s Hospital, Beckett Street, Leeds LS9 7TF.
Tel: 0113 206 6499 between 10am-4pm Monday to Friday

More details are also available from the information lounges. All the Leeds Cancer Support Services mentioned here can be contacted by email on: leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net

Macmillan Cancer Support

Freephone 0808 808 0000, 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday
A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people on 18001 0808 808 0121
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk