Radiotherapy for early glottis (voice box) cancer

Information for patients
This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your 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 may include radiographers, nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and dietitians.

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.

All your radiotherapy planning and treatment will take place in the Radiotherapy Department on Level -2, Bexley Wing, Leeds Cancer Centre (LS9 7TF).

Please do not bring any valuables into hospital with you as the Trust cannot accept liability for loss or theft.
What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy X-rays and other types of radiation to treat cancer. The tissues of the body are made up of tiny building blocks called cells. The radiotherapy causes damage to cancer cells in the treated area. Although normal cells are also affected, they can repair themselves and are able to recover. The effect of radiotherapy on normal cells is what causes side-effects. Radiotherapy is a local treatment. This means it only affects the part of the body that is treated.

Radiotherapy is often used as the main treatment for early stage cancer of the larynx. When you are having your radiotherapy you do not feel anything and it does not make you 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, shown here in the photograph. 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.
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.’

**How often is it given?**

Your radiotherapy will be given over a period of four weeks; this is a total of 20 treatments. Treatment is generally given daily, with rests at weekends. If your treatment goes over a bank holiday you will be treated on a Saturday close to this. The radiographers will go through this when you are given your appointment letter.

**Do I need to stay in hospital for treatment?**

Your treatment will be given as an outpatient but if your side-effects become a problem, your doctor may suggest a stay in hospital.
Students
The radiotherapy department is a training centre for 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.

Important advice before your treatment

Pregnancy
Radiotherapy can be harmful if given during pregnancy. If you are a woman of child bearing age you must use a reliable method of contraception before and during your radiotherapy. You should have been given a leaflet ‘Contraception and pregnancy during cancer treatment’. If you have not received this leaflet please ask a member of staff for a copy.

Smoking
If you are a smoker we very strongly advise you to stop smoking before treatment. Continuing to smoke during radiotherapy will:

- dramatically reduce the chances of your treatment being successful;
- increase the severity of the side-effects during your treatment;
- increase the risk of serious longer term side-effects;
- increase your risk of developing further cancers in the future.

There are now several ways in which you can receive help to stop smoking.

The NHS Stop Smoking Helpline is: 0300 123 1044

You can ask your Clinical Nurse Specialist or GP for local contacts or further support.
**Alcohol**

Drinking alcohol during your radiotherapy treatment can cause mouth and throat ulcers. It is important not to drink alcohol at all during your treatment. Please see page 20 for helpline numbers.

**Planning your radiotherapy**

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. This will include an appointment for the mould room.

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;
- something to eat and drink and 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. To help you stay still we will make a mask for your head and shoulders. You will wear this mask for your planning scan and treatments.

You will be given an appointment to attend Mould Room where the masks are made. 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 can help you. They can be contacted on 0113 206 7616 or email leedsth-tr.rtpatientsupport@nhs.net
In order to plan your treatment you will have a planning 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.

The scan will be taken with you lying in the same position as for your treatment wearing your mask. 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).

Planning scans are not diagnostic examinations and will not be reported on as such.

This CT scan is used to plan your treatment. As your treatment plan can be complex it may be 2-3 weeks before your treatment is ready to start. The radiographers will talk to you about future appointments. You will be given an appointment letter with your radiotherapy start date or you may be telephoned in a few days’ time with your next appointment.

**Nursing clinic in Princess Royal Suite**

Before starting your radiotherapy you will meet the nursing team in the radiotherapy review clinic. They will be able to advise you about how to look after yourself during your treatment. You will see them regularly during your treatment.
Having your radiotherapy

When you arrive for your treatment you should go to the reception at the entrance 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. You will be given a full list of all your treatment and clinic appointments.

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. 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.

You will wear your mask for each treatment. The radiographers will position you on the treatment couch, fit your mask and adjust the couch and machine to the correct positions. You will be asked to stay as still as possible during the treatment but you should breathe and swallow 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 moments at a time. The radiographers will be watching you on a closed circuit TV monitor (CCTV) during treatment. The CCTV camera is not recording or saving any images.
There is also an intercom system so the radiographers can talk to you. Please let the radiographers know if you would like to use the intercom system.

The treatment only takes a few minutes but you will be in the treatment room for about 15-20 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.

After the treatment is complete the radiographers will come back into the room to help you off the couch.

On some days the radiotherapy department may be busy and there may be a delay before your treatment. We will keep you informed of any delays, please see the information screens in the waiting areas. It may be a good idea to bring something to eat and drink with you and any medication you may need. There is a restaurant and café available on Level 0.
Your treatments will generally be on the same machine, although there may be days when this machine is being serviced and your treatment will be in a different room. It is very important that you do not miss treatment days as it may make your treatment less effective. If you feel you are unable to attend for any reason please telephone us so that we can discuss this with you. If you have any queries about your appointment times please discuss these with the radiotherapy co-ordinators on your treatment unit.

For appointment queries please telephone the radiotherapy reception desk 0113 206 8940 for further advice.

**Clinic appointments**

You will be seen each week in your consultant’s review clinic and in the nurse-led review clinic. These clinics are held in the Princess Royal Suite on Level -2 of Bexley Wing. You may also have appointments with the dietitians and speech and language therapists. These appointments help us to check how you are managing your treatment. You will be asked about your diet, swallowing, pain control and any other symptoms that you may have. If you have any problems, please let the radiographers who treat you each day know, when you arrive.

**Speech and swallowing during radiotherapy**

Speech and Language Therapists are trained to assess and advise about your ability to swallow and speak. They may assess you before starting radiotherapy or they might become involved in your care if you have problems swallowing or communicating during treatment.
What can I do to help my swallowing?
Some swallowing difficulties may be mild and can be managed easily. Here are a few simple changes you can make to what and how you eat and drink:

• It is really important you continue doing any exercises that you have been given by your speech and language therapist throughout your treatment;

• Make sure you take any medication given to you by the doctor and if you are still experiencing some pain or discomfort please tell the radiographers or nurses as soon as possible;

• Eat a soft and moist diet rather than dry, hard or crumbly foods. Use lots of sauces and gravy to help the food go down;

• Make sure you drink plenty of water throughout your treatment, to stop your mouth becoming too dry;

• Take your time when eating. Do not rush;

• Avoid distractions when eating and drinking. Turn off the television and do not talk when chewing and swallowing;

• Do not throw your head back when having a drink. Keep your chin down.

Side-effects
Side-effects can be divided into short term (acute) effects that happen during or soon after treatment and long term effects occurring months or years later. Some side-effects are common, whilst others are rare. It is important to tell the team looking after you if you suffer from any side-effects as there are ways to help you cope with them.
Possible short term side-effects

Most short term side-effects are common and are temporary. Side-effects tend to build up from about the second week of treatment and will be at their worst at the end or just after the treatment course.

Skin reactions

The skin in the treated area starts to redden or darken from the second week of treatment. It may become dry and itchy. Sometimes later in treatment it may peel and become weepy. The skin reaction towards the end of treatment can look quite alarming. 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 review clinic nursing staff in the Princess Royal Suite, telephone: 0113 206 7587.
**Tiredness (fatigue)**

Nearly all patients having radiotherapy will feel tired. Be prepared to take things easy during treatment and allow for extra rests. 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.

**Sore throat and throat ulcers**

This often happens after about two weeks of treatment and can make it more difficult to eat and drink because it might be:

- painful,
- too much effort or
- unsafe if ‘things go down the wrong way’

We will give advice to help you keep up your calorie intake and prescribe painkillers to make you more comfortable. Once the soreness settles after treatment you will be able to reduce your painkillers. If you have any queries about your painkillers after treatment please contact your consultant’s team or your GP.

It is important that you are well nourished and drink plenty of fluids during your treatment and avoid losing weight. This will keep you healthy and help your body to heal. If you lose a lot of weight during treatment your mask may no longer fit as well. If your mask fit is not good, we will have to ensure your position is correct with daily imaging. If we are concerned that your treatment may be affected we will have to have a new mask made, planning scan and replan done. The radiographers will check for this as they position you for treatment each day. We may ask you to see one of our specialist dietitians. Your weight and diet will be checked at the start and regularly through treatment.
When you are part way through treatment, you may need to change to a softer diet. We can give you liquid food supplements if needed. It is very likely that eating will not be pleasurable during treatment, but it is still important to try hard to keep up a good intake of calories. If your swallowing becomes too uncomfortable or difficult you may not be able to get enough calories from food and supplements. A feeding tube may be recommended if this is the case.

Sometimes the side-effects of radiotherapy can affect the natural reflex that closes your airway when you swallow food or drink. This means you may be at risk of food or drink going down into your lungs. This is called “aspiration” and means your swallowing is unsafe. This is not very common. You will be given more information by your team if you need a feeding tube. You should be able to swallow safely once the radiotherapy side-effects have fully settled.

**Chest infection**

This can happen if food or liquid goes down the wrong way. It is important to tell the radiotherapy team immediately if you are coughing or spluttering after swallowing, as this may mean that food or liquid is going **into your lungs rather than your stomach.**
**Sticky, thick saliva or phlegm**
You may produce more or thicker phlegm towards the end of treatment which can be uncomfortable and make you want to cough. We may suggest using a nebuliser to help. Drinking soda water can help loosen the secretions.

However do not drink if you have been advised that there is a risk of things going down the wrong way. Please discuss this with a member of your medical team if you are at all concerned.

**Loss of voice**
Your voice box can become inflamed and your voice may become hoarse, husky or go completely later in treatment. Your voice strength will generally return within a couple of months after treatment. You may need to see a speech and language therapist after your treatment, to help you recover your speech.

**Constipation**
Your bowel habit can be affected by changes in your diet and using painkillers. It is important to keep using your painkillers regularly but please let us know if you are having difficulties opening your bowels.

**Please note**
Please read the information leaflets enclosed with any medications used, this will explain any side-effects you may experience when taking them.

If you are at all concerned about any side-effects you are experiencing from your medication, please talk to your pharmacist, nurse specialist or GP.
Possible long term side-effects

Long term side-effects can happen months to years after your radiotherapy. The list below can seem alarming, but please remember serious late side-effects are very rare.

- Skin changes: occasionally the skin may be discoloured (usually darker), thickened (fibrosis) and there may be small ‘spider’ blood vessels visible near the skin surface;
- Chest infections due to food or liquids being breathed in if the swallowing muscles are not working properly;
- Hoarseness, you may experience a change in the quality of your voice;
- Underactive thyroid gland causing a lack of thyroid hormones. This can be easily treated with tablets. This can happen quite a long time after the radiotherapy;
- Damage to the cartilage of the voice box or to the soft tissues of the neck. Occasionally surgery may be needed to correct this. This is a very rare side-effect;
- Damage to the blood vessels; this may lead to a slightly higher risk of stroke;
- Cancers caused years later by having radiotherapy are very rare.

Late skin effects:

- Three months to a year after treatment your skin can appear ‘shiny’ and will also be dry. Look after your skin by using a moisturiser every day. Please note, during treatment only use the skin care products advised by your radiotherapy team.
- Tiny ‘spider’ veins can appear after a year and are permanent. If you are worried by the appearance you can use cosmetic camouflage with a special hardwearing concealer - ask the medical team about this.
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.

Further information and support

We all have our own ways of coping with difficulties. Some people have a close network of family and friends who provide emotional support, others would rather seek help from people who are not involved with their illness. If you have any questions or need more support please ask your hospital team.

Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS)

Your CNS is available to discuss any aspect of your treatment with you. You will be seen by a CNS before you start your treatment. This is to offer support and advice about the practicalities and effects of treatment and answer any questions you may have. The CNS will also assess and discuss any physical, psychological, social, occupational or spiritual needs that you may have. They can refer you to other services if needed, for instance, benefits advice. You should be given a ‘key worker’ as a contact for support through your treatment; this is usually the CNS.

Available Monday - Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm 0113 206 8616
Macmillan Radiographer and Nurse Specialists
Sometimes people need more help if they are feeling depressed, very anxious or are having problems accepting their diagnosis. If this is the case you may benefit from seeing the Macmillan radiographer or nurse specialist. Your doctor, radiographer, nurse, or dietitian can refer you.

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 Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

The 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 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
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

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

Changing Faces
A national charity committed to providing help for people with disfigurements.
Support, information and advice: Tel 0300 012 0275
Skin camouflage: Tel 0300 012 0276

Mouth Cancer Foundation
A UK charity aiming to support people with mouth, throat and other head and neck cancer.
website: www.mouthcancerfoundation.org

Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel: 0800 9177 650  email: help@aamail.org
website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Stopping smoking
One You Leeds: Tel 0800 169 4219  web: oneyouleeds.org.uk
NHS Smokefree: Tel 0300 123 1044
Car Parking

When you are coming for radiotherapy planning and treatment your **car parking is free** in the multi-storey car park.

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.
**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**.