

Kent Oncology Centre

High Dose Rate Intracavitary Gynaecological Brachytherapy

Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you to understand about brachytherapy (internal radiotherapy) to the cervix or uterus (womb), the side effects that may occur and the best management of these side effects. If you would like to speak to one of the radiotherapy team please feel free to contact them on the following numbers:

Maidstone Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist  01622 225094

 01622 227331

 07825 978632

Appointment Enquiries  01622 225080

Kent Oncology Centre website: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

What is HDR Intracavitary Gynaecological Brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is carefully controlled radiation treatment delivered directly to an area of the body using special applicators (tubes) positioned inside the body.

This specific type of Brachytherapy usually involves **three treatments** given once a week. For each treatment you will be given a spinal anaesthetic with sedation or a short general anaesthetic so that the applicators (tubes) can be placed inside your uterus (womb) and vagina.

These applicators allow a small radioactive source, which gives radiation treatment, to be precisely placed inside your body; they remain in place while the treatment is delivered. You will be awake during the actual treatment.

Brachytherapy is usually combined with external radiotherapy; your consultant or specialist radiographer will explain when this will take place. Leaflets about External Beam Radiotherapy are also available.

Pregnant?

Please tell the medical staff if you might be pregnant; radiotherapy can harm the developing baby.

Preparation

You will be asked to attend a clinic appointment before your treatment. This is to check that you are fit to have a spinal or general anaesthetic. A blood sample will be taken and a simple test called an ECG will be carried out to check your heart.

You are advised not to smoke for 24 hours before having a general anaesthetic.

You should not eat or drink from midnight on the day of your treatment

On the day of the first treatment

You will need to report to **Charles Dickens Day Unit** at 8.00am on the morning of your treatment. If you choose, one relative or friend may remain with you during your stay on the unit. However, they will not be able to accompany you into the treatment rooms.

Your nurse will prepare you for theatre and the anaesthetist will meet you. You are required to give your consent before the procedure can be carried out.

You will probably have given consent at an earlier appointment, but it will be confirmed before proceeding. If you have any questions or concerns about the procedure please make sure we have addressed these before giving consent.

Positioning the applicators

You will be taken to the operating theatre on Charles Dickens Day Unit where you will be given a spinal anaesthetic with sedation, or general anaesthetic. Your Oncology Consultant will insert the treatment applicators (tubes) into your uterus and vagina. An ultrasound scan of your tummy will be used to help in the positioning of the applicators. They are held in place by gauze packing in the vagina. A urinary catheter will also be inserted so that you do not need to use the toilet whilst the applicators are in position.

Checking the positioning of the applicators

Once the applicators are in place, you will be taken on your bed for a CT or MRI scan. The images from the scan are then used to help plan your treatment

Treatment

You will be taken back to the day unit to recover whilst your treatment is being planned. This may take up to six hours. You will need to remain lying on your bed so that the applicators do not move but you will be propped up so that you can eat and drink.

When your treatment plan is ready you will be taken back into the treatment room where the brachytherapy radiographers will connect the applicators to the treatment machine. They will advise you how long the treatment will take (usually between four to twelve minutes).

The radiographers will leave the room but will watch you on monitors throughout the treatment and can come back in at any time should it be required.

When the treatment is completed the radiographers enter the room and remove the applicators and urinary catheter. This can be uncomfortable and you will be offered pain relief whilst this takes place. You will then be taken back to your room on the day unit where you can stay until you feel ready to go home.

Is it painful?

The treatment is painless, but the applicators may cause you a little discomfort. A spinal anaesthetic will help to give pain relief for about two to three hours after insertion of the treatment applicators. If you start to become uncomfortable please tell the nursing staff so that medication can be given to help control any pain.

Going home

This procedure is usually completed as a day case, so when you feel ready you should be able to go home.

After having an anaesthetic your concentration may be impaired, so for a minimum of 24 hours afterwards you should not:

- drive a motor vehicle or ride a bicycle (so you must arrange for someone to take you home)
- operate machinery
- drink alcohol
- make any important decisions or sign any legal documents

You will be given further advice by the radiographers before you leave the hospital.

No radioactive materials remain inside you so it is quite safe to mix with family and friends.

You will be given dates to return to Charles Dickens Day Unit for your two remaining treatments. Again, you should not eat or drink from midnight on these days.

The same process for the first treatment is repeated in the subsequent appointments.

After the treatment

You will be sent an appointment to see the Oncology Consultant approximately six to eight weeks after your course of treatment is completed.

You will be under the care of your GP and community nurse until you return for your follow-up appointment.

Side effects

Please read through the following list of side effects that you **may** experience after your treatment. These side effects are usually only short term but occasionally some women develop long-term bowel, bladder or vaginal problems. The consultant will discuss these with you when you are asked to give consent for treatment. The after effects of this treatment are similar to **external beam radiotherapy** to your pelvis.

Tiredness

Feeling tired after this treatment is quite normal; we advise you to rest as much as you feel you need. Return to work when you feel ready. Light exercise, e.g. walking, can help to improve tiredness.

Bowel

Your bowel movements may increase in frequency and urgency after treatment. This may last a few weeks. Changing your diet or taking medication can help. We advise that you drink plenty of fluids. If symptoms persist contact your GP for advice.

Bladder

You may experience some irritation when passing water. Drinking plenty of fluids can help. If your urine is cloudy or smelly this may be a sign of infection; you may need medication if it does not get better. If symptoms persist contact your GP for advice.

Pain / discomfort

You may have some cramp like pain and vaginal soreness. Mild painkillers and warm baths can help. If symptoms persist contact your GP.

Vaginal discharge / bleeding

You may have a slight discharge following treatment; this is normal. If the discharge persists, or is smelly or pale green / yellow, tell your GP as you may have an infection. Regular bathing helps reduce the risk of infection; wearing cotton pants and avoiding wearing tight trousers or tights can also help.

Vaginal scarring

The risk of this is slightly higher following Brachytherapy than following external beam radiotherapy. The Macmillan Specialist Radiographer or brachytherapy radiographers will discuss this with you and give you information about using a vaginal dilator and lubricants to help prevent this. This should help with future internal examinations and sexual intercourse. The vagina may also be very dry. You may find it beneficial to use a vaginal moisturiser which your GP or pharmacist will be able to advise on.

Feelings

Emotional reaction following treatment differs from person to person, and is part of the process of trying to come to terms with an illness. Please contact your Macmillan Specialist Radiographer or Specialist Nurse if you would like to talk to someone. Other useful sources of information are listed below.

Alternative treatments

There is no proven alternative to HDR Intracavitary Gynaecological Brachytherapy. This treatment is offered after External Beam Therapy as a means of effectively increasing the radiation dose to the tumour.

Further information, support and advice can be obtained from:

Macmillan Cancer Support

Free phone

 0808 808 0000

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

**Kent Oncology Macmillan Cancer Information Centre
Maidstone Hospital**

 01622 227064

Offers support and information to anyone who has concerns about cancer (patients, relatives, friends or carers)

Kent Oncology Centre

Website: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Cancer Research

This charity provides information about cancer, treatment and clinical trials

 0808 800 4040

Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Kent Oncology Centre website:

www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the PALS Team. We will do our best to arrange this.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you would like to raise any concerns, make comments and suggestions or require information on Trust services, you can contact **PALS**. Office opening times are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 4.00pm. Both offices offer a 24 hour answering machine. Messages will be responded to within one working day, so please do leave a contact number.

PALS Maidstone Hospital

PALS Tunbridge Wells Hospital

PALS Email

PALS SMS

PALS Maidstone Fax

PALS Tunbridge Wells Fax

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