

Kent Oncology Centre

**High Dose Rate Vaginal Vault
Brachytherapy**
Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand brachytherapy (internal radiotherapy) to the vaginal vault, 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 numbers given below:

Maidstone Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist

 01622 225094

 07825 978632

Appointment enquiries

 01622 225080

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

What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is carefully controlled radiation treatment delivered directly to an area of the body using special applicators positioned inside the body. This specific type of brachytherapy involves placing a smooth plastic cylinder (applicator) inside the vagina for a few minutes whilst the treatment is delivered.

The treatment is painless although it might feel slightly uncomfortable whilst the applicator is in place.

Your consultant oncologist may recommend that you have this treatment as well as external beam radiotherapy. If so you will have two brachytherapy treatments about one week after completing your radiotherapy; the two brachytherapy treatments will be given in the same week.

If your consultant oncologist has recommended that you have brachytherapy only, then you will be given three treatments with a one week gap in between each one.

Pregnant?

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

Preparation

There are no special preparations before treatment but you may feel more comfortable if you empty your bladder beforehand.

The therapy radiographers will show you into the treatment room and advise you what items of clothing need to be removed. You will then be asked to lie on a treatment couch whilst your consultant examines you and inserts the treatment applicator.

Treatment

The therapy radiographers will leave the room while the treatment is delivered through the applicator. Before they leave they will tell you how long the treatment will take (around five minutes) and ensure that you are as comfortable as possible before starting. They will watch you on monitors outside the room throughout the treatment and can come back into the room at any time should it be required.

Treatment completion

When the treatment is completed the therapy radiographers will come into the room and remove the treatment applicator from inside you. You can then get dressed and leave the room. No radioactive materials remain inside you and it is quite safe to mix with family and friends.

Aftercare

After your final treatment the therapy radiographers will ensure that a follow up appointment with your consultant oncologist is booked for about eight weeks after treatment. They will also talk with you about side effects you may experience.

Side effects

Brachytherapy treatment only treats a very small area of the body and therefore you are unlikely to experience many side effects. The most likely effects in the short term are bowel and bladder irritation, and in the long term are dryness and scarring of the vagina.

Bowel

You may find that your bowel movements increase in frequency or urgency for two to three weeks after treatment. This is most likely if you have also had external beam radiotherapy as your bowels may still be unsettled from that. Drinking plenty of fluids and altering your diet may help. Occasionally medication is required to control symptoms.

Bladder irritation

You may experience some irritation on passing water and a need to urinate more frequently for two to three weeks after treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids can help. If symptoms persist or your urine is cloudy or smelly, this could be a sign of infection; in this case contact your GP for advice.

Vaginal discharge/bleeding

You might notice a small amount of bleeding (spotting) after your first treatment but it is unlikely that you will have any further bleeding as a result of the treatment. Some women notice a slight increase in discharge. If this occurs after completion of treatment and it is troublesome or smells offensive then contact your GP for advice.

Vaginal dryness and fibrosis (scarring)

The lining of the vagina can become dry after brachytherapy. During intercourse you will probably need to use a lubricant. You may also find it beneficial to use a vaginal moisturiser. Your specialist radiographer will be able to advise you about this or you may wish to discuss it with your GP or pharmacist.

Sometimes after treatment scar tissue can form inside the vagina, and the walls of the vagina can stick together. This can make it uncomfortable for intercourse or when you need to be examined as part of your follow up consultations.

We recommend that you use a vaginal dilator for a few months after treatment to try to prevent this from happening. A dilator is very similar to the treatment applicator that is used for your treatment. At the end of your treatment the therapy radiographers will advise you on using vaginal dilators and will give you the information leaflet '**Advice about using dilators after radiotherapy**'.

Please use this space to write any notes or questions you may have.



Further information 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

Patient Experience Teams (PALS) for East Kent patients

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

Desk at the outpatient's entrance of the hospital

Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital

Office at the main entrance of the hospital (Ramsgate Road)

William Harvey Hospital

Desk at the main entrance of the hospital

☎ 01227 783145 or 01227 864314

Email: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Macmillan Cancer Support.

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

☎ 01622 224960

PALS Tunbridge Wells Hospital

☎ 01892 632953

PALS Email

mtwpals@nhs.net

PALS SMS

☎ 07747 782317

PALS Maidstone Fax

☎ 01622 224843

PALS Tunbridge Wells Fax

☎ 01892 632954

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