

## Patient information factsheet

# Brachytherapy treatment for cervical cancer

**This leaflet has been produced to help you understand more about your brachytherapy (internal) treatment so you know what to expect. We hope it will provide answers to most of your questions but if there is anything that is unclear, please ask any member of the radiotherapy team who will be pleased to advise you.**

### What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is an internal treatment which enables a treatment dose of radiation to be given directly to the tumour site.

### Pre-assessment for your treatment

Before your treatment you will receive a letter inviting you to attend a pre-assessment appointment where your general health will be assessed.

A nurse will take a blood test, ECG (heart tracing), urine sample and MRSA (meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) screening, via a nose and groin swab. Your appointment should take no longer than two hours.

### Admission to the surgical day unit for your treatment

You will receive an admission letter in the post.

Please arrive at the surgical day unit, F level, East Wing,  
Southampton General Hospital at 7.30am on Tuesday .....

In preparation for the procedure please:

Have nothing to eat or drink from midnight on Monday .....  
(You may have sips of water for up to two hours before your admission if required).

- Have a bath or shower on the morning of the procedure using the special wash solution given to you.
- Remove all make up, nail varnish, acrylic nails and jewellery apart from a wedding ring. Please leave jewellery and valuables at home.
- Bring your regular medications with you and make sure you have pain relief tablets available for when you get home after the treatment (paracetamol and/or ibuprofen, for example). Please bring some sanitary pads for after the procedure.

If you are experiencing diarrhoea please inform a member of staff when you are being admitted as you might need some medication to stop this.

You will be offered meal choices during your stay on the ward. You may like to bring your own drinks, books or magazines to help make your stay more comfortable.

## What will happen on the day of your treatment

### Preparation

After admission to the surgical day unit you will be taken to theatre where you will have a spinal anaesthetic or an epidural to ensure you don't feel anything from the waist down.

You will also be given medication to make you drowsy.

A catheter will be placed in your bladder as you will be unable to get out of bed to go to the toilet. You will also have treatment applicators inserted into your vagina and womb.

These are special devices that allow your doctors to direct the radiotherapy treatment where it is needed and, along with your catheter, will stay inside you until you have completed your third treatment. Until then, to stop the applicators from moving you will have to lie flat on a hospital bed. You can have two pillows under your head for comfort.

You will also be given some medication to prevent you from needing to empty your bowels, as you won't be able to go to the toilet with the applicators in place.

After theatre you will be taken to a recovery room where a nurse will care for you until you are fully awake. You will then be taken for an MRI scan and a CT scan to check the position of the treatment applicators. From there you will return to C4 ward while the doctors and physicists (who are responsible for calculating the dose of radiotherapy required) prepare the treatment.

The brachytherapy specialist nurse will ensure your comfort during this wait, including pain relief if necessary.

### Treatment

The brachytherapy specialist nurse will accompany you to the radiotherapy department later that afternoon to have your first treatment.

You will be transferred onto a treatment couch in the treatment room and flexible tubes will be connected between your applicators and the brachytherapy machine. The treatment will take about 20 minutes.

The radiographers and nurses will leave the room while the treatment is given but will watch you carefully on the discreet closed circuit TV monitors. You will not feel anything during the treatment.

After the first treatment you will return to C4 ward where you will remain lying flat. The following morning you will be taken for another CT scan and the second treatment will then be planned.

You will receive the second treatment mid morning and the third treatment later that afternoon. Between treatments you will return to C4 ward.

When all three treatments are finished the applicators and catheter will be removed. You will be offered some pain relief and Entonox (gas and air) before their removal.

You will then be taken back to C4 ward for another overnight stay.

You are allowed to have visitors, and normal visiting hours (usually 10am to 8pm) will apply when you are on the ward.

This treatment does not make you radioactive so it is perfectly safe to be with other people, including children (although please speak to the nurse in charge if you would like children to visit you on the ward).

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## Going home

You will need to arrange for someone to collect you from C4 ward on the Thursday morning to take you home.

## Possible side effects of brachytherapy

The side effects from your brachytherapy treatment will be no different from those you may already be experiencing from your external radiotherapy treatment. You will be advised to continue drinking plenty of fluids.

You may have a vaginal discharge after internal treatment because a lubricant cream is used when the applicators are inserted into your vagina. This should only last a day or two. You may also experience some vaginal blood loss after treatment, so please bring some sanitary towels with you.

## After radiotherapy

On the last day of your treatment, you will be told about a follow-up appointment with your doctor. This appointment is usually for about six to eight weeks' time, to allow time for the area to recover. It's normal for the effects of the treatment to persist for two to three weeks, so continue with any skin care and dietary advice that you have found helpful until things return to normal.

## Useful information

### Parking

Car park 8 is situated outside the Oncology Centre. This can be found by following directions for the eye unit. Parking spaces are limited, so please allow plenty of time to park. Patients having radiotherapy treatment are entitled to a discount on parking. Remember to validate your ticket at the radiotherapy reception before paying at the parking machine.

### Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

This is located on B level in the East Wing Courtyard. Opening hours are Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm. Drop-in sessions are available or you can book an appointment by calling **023 8120 6037**.

### Who to contact if you have concerns

If you have urgent symptoms relating to your current radiotherapy treatment, please call the acute oncology service at Southampton General Hospital on **07867 973649**. This number is answered 24-hours, seven days a week, but is only for treatment-related symptoms and not for general queries such as rearranging appointments or hospital transport, for example.

If your symptoms are not urgent, you can speak to one of the radiographers when you attend for your radiotherapy treatment.

In an emergency call 999.

If you have any concerns about your admission please discuss this with your treatment radiographers or contact the gynaecological oncology nurse specialists on **023 8120 8765**.

### Free prescriptions

Patients having treatment for cancer are entitled to free NHS prescriptions. If you are not already claiming for these, please ask a member of staff for an exemption certificate.

## Useful links

NHS Choices – Radiotherapy side effects:

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Radiotherapy/Pages/Side-effects.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Radiotherapy/Pages/Side-effects.aspx)

Cancer Research UK:

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer)

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/womb-cancer/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/womb-cancer/)

**If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.**