

## Arden Cancer Centre

# Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Treatment for Gynaecological Cancer

## What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the area being treated. Radiotherapy can also damage normal cells in the treatment area which can cause some side effects, but radiotherapy is planned very carefully to shield as much healthy tissue as possible in order to reduce these side effects. The tissues usually heal, with an improvement in side effects and symptoms over time

There are 2 types of radiotherapy. External beam radiotherapy is given externally using a machine called a Linear Accelerator (Linac). Brachytherapy is given internally using a machine called a HDR Selectron Unit. Many patients will have both types of treatment. If you are to have brachytherapy treatment you will be given a separate booklet.

Both male and female staff will treat you. We are a teaching hospital and have student radiographers on placement in radiotherapy who are supervised by trained staff.

For more information about radiotherapy and to watch our department video go to:-

<https://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/our-services-and-people/our-departments/radiotherapy/>



## Patient Information

### **Consent forms**

Before you undergo this procedure you will be required to sign a consent form which indicates that your doctor has explained the treatment procedure and any possible side effects to you and that you agree to go ahead with treatment.

### **Pacemakers**

**If you have a pacemaker or implantable defibrillator, please mention this to your doctor and the radiographers before your first treatment as the performance of your device can be altered by the Linac, and it may need testing before and after treatment.**

### **Pregnancy**

If you are, or become, pregnant at any time before or during your treatment it is important to inform a member of staff as soon as possible. There is a significant risk to an unborn baby from radiotherapy.

For advice on contraception please speak to your consultant or GP.

### **Chemotherapy**

Your doctor may also prescribe chemotherapy to be administered during your course of radiotherapy. You will be given specific written information and consented separately for this.

### **What is treatment planning?**

A period of planning or preparation is required before your treatment can start. This is to allow accurate “aiming” of the radiotherapy at your tumour and calculation of how to deliver the correct dose of radiation to it.

This will involve an initial visit for a CT planning scan at the Arden Centre and then a gap of three to four weeks before your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

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### **CT Planning Scan**

The CT planning scan is a normal CT scan, but it is used to define the exact area to be treated, rather than for diagnosis, so you will not be given any results from this scan.

For the CT scan and subsequent treatment, you will be required to remove the clothing over your pelvis. Every effort will be made to keep you covered where possible. Gowns are available if you need one. You will be carefully positioned on the CT couch by the radiographers, lying on your back with sponges under your head, knees and feet for support. This is the same position that you will be in everyday for your radiotherapy treatments.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will be watching you at all times. The staff may need to put some pen marks and markers on your skin to help plan your treatment. You can wash off the pen marks after this visit and the radiographers will remove the markers before you leave. After the scan, the radiographers will put small permanent marks on your skin (a tattoo), using ink and a needle. These marks are to show exactly where to position you for your treatment.

### **Contrast**

Sometimes a contrast medium is used to help the radiographers, doctors and physics team to see organs more clearly on the CT scan. This can be given by mouth, injected into a vein or both. You will be told if you need contrast and given information about it. If you have had contrast before and had any kind of reaction to it please let your doctor or the radiographers know. This is only required for treatment planning and not whilst you are on daily radiotherapy.

### **Bowel and bladder preparation**

**You will need to have an empty rectum and a comfortably full bladder for your CT planning scan and for all your radiotherapy treatment appointments.**

This can help to reduce the side effects to the bladder and rectum. If the bladder isn't full or the rectum isn't empty, or if there is excess gas/wind in the bowel, it may make treatment planning and the treatment itself more difficult. It may mean that we have to repeat your CT planning scan. Once you start treatment it may mean that you are asked to get off the treatment

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couch before having treatment to fill the bladder or empty the bowel sufficiently to ensure that the treatment is given accurately.

### Full bladder preparation

To avoid becoming dehydrated, it is important that you drink at least 2 litres of fluid (4pints) throughout the day starting in the week before your CT planning scan and throughout treatment. The amount of fluid and time it takes to fill the bladder varies from one person to another. We suggest you try the following initially:-

- 1 hour before your appointment, empty your bladder
- Then drink 300ml of water (approximately 2 plastic cups or half a pint) straight away so that your bladder is comfortably full when it is time to treat you.
- Do not urinate until your treatment appointment is completed (if you cannot hold your urine before your treatment, please inform the receptionist who will inform your radiographer).
- Check the notice board in the waiting room for any delays on your treatment machine.
- We appreciate that it can be difficult to hold your urine during these times. If you find it difficult holding your urine for 1 hour, we recommend that you practise the above instructions every day from receiving this information to your CT planning scan and subsequent treatments.

Cutting down on caffeine may help with bladder control; try to reduce your intake of coffee, tea and cola. There are caffeine free alternatives available. You may find that you get a slight headache initially if you normally have a lot of caffeine.

Pelvic floor exercises may help to hold your urine for longer but it can take several weeks or months to notice an improvement.

### Empty Rectum Preparation:

- **You should have an empty rectum for your CT planning scan and every treatment.**
- If you normally take laxatives then continue to do so.
- If your doctor prescribed laxatives and / or enemas use them as directed. If you **do not** usually open your bowels fully every morning

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and do not have any laxatives or enemas you should try a stimulant laxative such as Senna, starting 2-3 days before your CT scan.

- When treatment is due to start, use the laxatives every day for 2 days before the start of your radiotherapy and throughout your treatment, but stop if your bowels become loose or your treatment radiographers advise otherwise.

## Enemas

Your doctor or radiographer may have recommended micro-enemas to help you to have an empty rectum for your treatment. A micro-enema is a small enema that is inserted into the rectum (back passage) daily about 2 hours before your CT planning scan and each daily treatment. The enema is usually effective within 30 minutes. Your doctor will discuss this with you if it is needed and give you a prescription.

Please contact us for further advice if you have any concerns about being able to attend with a full bladder and an empty rectum for your CT planning scan appointment, on: Telephone: 024 7696 7290 or 024 7696 7493

## Wind

If you have excess wind in the bowel this will show on your CT planning scan and treatment scans.

It is important to eat regularly, not eating in order to achieve an empty rectum will cause more wind, so please do not skip meals.

### **For 2 days before your CT planning scan and throughout treatment:**

- Reduce green leafy vegetables to minimise wind.
- Avoid food or drink which gives you wind.
- Avoid fizzy drinks and chewing gum.

Advice is available for patients having problems with wind, constipation or diarrhoea. Please contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist 024 76 967290.

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### Treatment

Radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. To do this they will ask you to remove any clothing from the treatment area. It is essential to make sure treatment is given safely and accurately, and you will be positioned on the treatment couch in exactly the same way as when you had your planning scan.

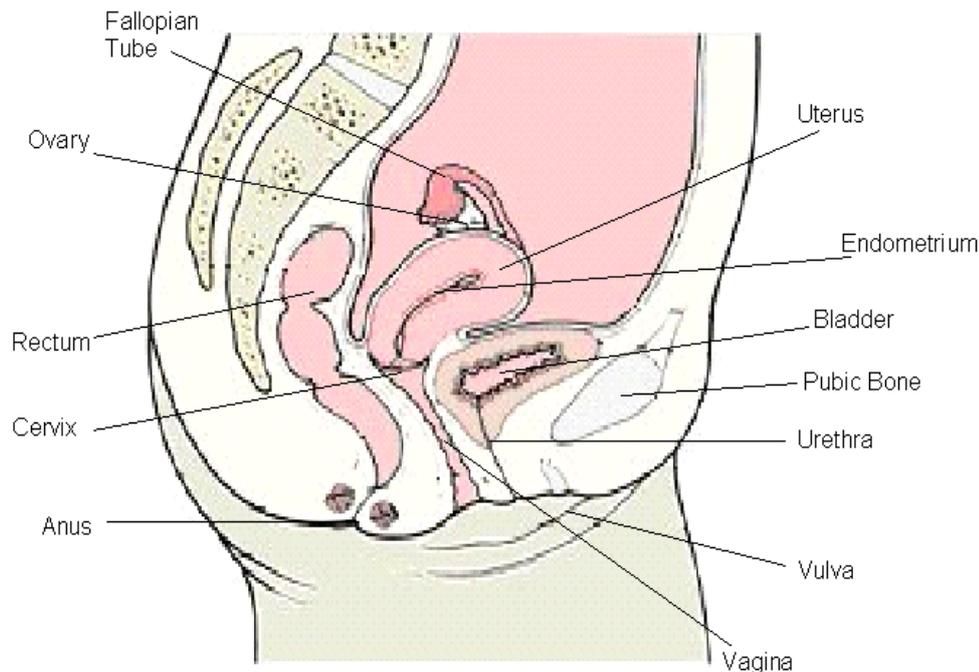
The radiographers will “line you up” with the machine by dimming the room lights and using laser lights and a bright light from the machine. The machine may move around you during this process but in most cases will not touch you.

When you and the machine are in the correct position, the radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on. You will need to lie quite still but can breathe normally. You will not feel anything during the treatment but the machine will move around you and make a buzzing noise. The treatment times are very short, but images will be taken beforehand to check that the treatment is being delivered accurately to the correct area. The radiographers will be watching you throughout on closed circuit television cameras and can hear you on an intercom. They can switch the machine off and enter the room if you move or call for assistance.

**Once the machine has switched off there is no radiation present, you will not be radioactive and you are safe to be near pregnant women and children.**

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### Female Pelvis



#### Diagram showing Uterus, Ovaries, Vagina and Cervix

### Side effects of treatment

When treating female cancers in the pelvis, treating a small amount of healthy tissue is unavoidable. For this reason, radiotherapy can often have some unwanted side effects.

Research is going on all the time to make the treatment as effective as possible and to reduce the risk of these side effects. Side effects can be thought of as early (acute) and late (chronic) effects.

#### Early effects:

These effects occur during your treatment and for a few weeks after treatment has finished.

#### Effects on the bladder:

- An increase in frequency of urination (peeing)
- Not able to hold your urine for as long as usual (urgency)
- A burning sensation when passing urine
- Blood in your urine

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- Stinging on passing urine.

### **We advise you to:**

- Drink plenty of fluids, 2 - 3 litres a day
- Avoid drinks that can irritate the bladder such as tea, green tea, coffee and alcohol, caffeine free alternatives are better but should still be drunk in moderation
- Drink plenty of water or squash
- Please tell the radiographers treating you if you think you may have urinary problems.

### **Effects on the bowel:**

- A bloated and tender feeling in your tummy
- An increase in the number of bowel movements
- Loose stools, urgency and diarrhoea
- Occasionally bleeding from the back passage.

### **We advise you to:**

- Eat a normal well balanced diet
- Avoid food and drink that give you wind
- If your bowels are loose we may advise you to change your diet
- If required we can arrange for you to see a dietitian whilst you are attending for treatment.
- Sometimes drugs such as loperamide (Imodium) are needed to control diarrhoea

### **Effects on the skin:**

- Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction similar to exposure to the sun in the area treated
- Towards the end of treatment the skin may become red and / or dry and itchy
- Sometimes moist patches may develop, particularly in your groins or any skin folds such as under your tummy.

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### We advise that you:

- Wash treated area daily with your usual soap or shower gel and pat your skin dry with a soft towel
- Apply your usual skin moisturiser on the treatment area two or three times a day. Gently smooth it onto your skin until it is absorbed. Do not apply just before your treatment.
- If you need to, ask your GP to prescribe a suitable skin moisturiser, otherwise discuss this with your treatment radiographers at the start of your radiotherapy. They may be able to give you a sample moisturiser to try
- Wear loose-fitting clothing next to the skin (cotton is a good natural fibre)
- Avoid the use of sun lamps, spray tans or skin colouring lotions
- Avoid using hot water bottles or ice packs in the treatment area
- Avoid shaving in the area being treated (if you have to shave then use an electric razor for dry shaving only. When the skin becomes visibly red, stop shaving). No wet shaving, hair removal creams, lasers or wax should be used.

### Swimming

You may continue to swim if your skin is not blistered or peeling, providing that you wash the treatment area before and afterwards and apply moisturiser. Care should be taken as chlorinated water can have a drying effect on the skin. Do not swim if you have an infection or your skin is irritated.

### Other effects

- **Tiredness.** If you feel tired try to rest as much as you can. Research has found that gentle exercise such as a short daily walk may help the symptoms of tiredness and fatigue.
- **Nausea.** Let the radiographers know if this is a problem as anti-sickness tablets can be prescribed. Eating light meals and drinking plenty of fluids can help.
- **Vaginal discharge.** Some women may experience a discharge from the front passage (vagina) which may be bloody. Please tell the radiographers treating you if this happens.

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- **Hair loss** can occur in the treatment area, so you may lose some pubic hair. It will grow back but may be thinner.
- The treatment does **not** make you radioactive. It is safe to be near children and pregnant women.

### Late effects

These may occur **months to years** after completion of treatment and may include:

- Vaginal dryness and narrowing - radiotherapy can cause a narrowing and shortening of the vagina. You will be advised to use a vaginal dilator 2 or 3 times a week for up to a year after treatment to help to reduce this and to maintain the opening of the vagina, which can make future clinical examinations and intercourse more comfortable for you. Radiotherapy may also cause some dryness so a lubricating gel may be recommended or prescribed to help.
- Swollen legs - in some people, one or both of the legs can become swollen (lymphoedema). This is more likely to occur in women who have had both surgery and radiotherapy to the lymph nodes. Your doctor should be able to give you information about this and how it can be managed.
- Bladder changes - can include frequency, reduced bladder capacity, leakage and blood in the urine.
- Bowel changes - can include loose bowel motions, urgency, narrowing of the bowel and bleeding from the rectum.
- Radiotherapy will induce menopause in premenopausal women resulting in infertility. Hormone replacement therapy may be recommended, please speak to your consultant for more information.
- There is a small risk of radiotherapy affecting the bones of the pelvis causing them to become weak, with the possibility of fine hair-line cracks developing called pelvic insufficiency fractures
- There is a very small risk (about 1-2% per 10 years follow-up) of a secondary cancer developing in the treatment area in the years following your radiotherapy.

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**Very rarely** a bladder or bowel fistulae can develop. This condition arises when an abnormal connection forms between two organs that are not normally connected, causing leakage of faeces or urine.

**These long-term changes can be irreversible and MAY need investigation and management. Very rarely, if complications become sufficiently severe, surgical referral and intervention has to be considered. We would expect the risk of severe late effects, warranting surgery, to be less than 2% (i.e. 2 in 100 people). Risks will vary with the type of cancer, the extent and the type of treatment.**

There is a booklet giving detailed information about potential side effects entitled "Managing the Late effects of Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women", which is produced by Macmillan Cancer Support. Please ask your doctor or radiographer if you would like a copy.

If you develop new symptoms after your treatment is over, or you are concerned that the immediate side effects are not clearing up, you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

There is often a simple explanation for these symptoms and they do not necessarily mean you will develop the late effects of treatment.

## Treatment reviews

At some point during your treatment you may be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with either a review radiographer or a doctor. The aim of this review is to discuss any side effects that you may be experiencing as a result of your treatment, and any side effects that may occur as the treatment continues.

It is not usually possible to give you any information on how effective the treatment so far has been, at these review sessions for two reasons:

- Firstly, although we take pictures of the treatment area during your radiotherapy, they are to check the position of the treatment field and are not detailed enough to show us how well the treatment is working.

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- Secondly, there is a delay in the way that radiotherapy works, so the effects of treatment can't be assessed until a number of weeks after the treatment has finished.

### **After treatment**

The side effects from the treatment will continue for several weeks after the treatment course has been completed. After finishing your treatment you will receive an appointment to see your consultant approximately 6 to 8 weeks later to assess how well you are recovering from treatment and the response to treatment.

If you have any queries or concerns once your treatment has finished you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290 .If your call is urgent, please contact your own G.P.

### **Sexual relationships**

Intercourse may not be possible for a few weeks following your treatment as your vagina will be inflamed. Some narrowing of the vagina can occur after radiotherapy, so it is beneficial to use the vaginal dilators that will be discussed with you, to make intercourse more comfortable. Using a lubricant jelly when intercourse resumes can ease vaginal dryness.

### **Where is the Arden Centre?**

The Arden Centre is situated in the west wing of University Hospital Coventry. Please visit the University Hospital web site for up to date maps and directions: [www.uhcv.nhs.uk](http://www.uhcv.nhs.uk) .

### **How shall I travel?**

#### **By car**

You can drive whilst having radiotherapy treatment unless you have been advised not to for another reason.

Sat Nav postcode: CV2 2DX

At busy times it can be very difficult to park so please allow extra time There are several visitor car parks across the site and there are drop-off points near the main entrance and the Women's and Children's entrance which allow for 10 minutes of free parking. Disabled car parking facilities are located near the main entrance. Charges apply in all car parks and

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Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) is live across all visitor car parks, this means that our car parks no longer issue tickets at barriers and instead read your number plate as you enter. Payment is then required at one of the payment machines before exiting the car park and can be made using cash, card or contactless. Payment can also be made by telephone or online before midnight, see the trust website for details.

**However, you are entitled to free parking whilst on radiotherapy treatment, you will need to give your registration number to the Arden Centre receptionist on arrival, if you don't know your registration number we suggest you make a note of it or take a photo of the number plate. Please note that free parking does not include clinic appointments, complementary therapy and counselling appointments, all of which must be paid for.**

### Public Transport

Many bus routes include the hospital with buses driving onto the site, stopping close to the main entrance. **For more information about bus services to University Hospital call the traveline on: 0870 608 2608 or visit [www.networkwestmidlands.com](http://www.networkwestmidlands.com).**

### Hospital Transport

Hospital transport is available where there is a medical need, not for social or financial reasons.

If you receive Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component or have a vehicle under the mobility scheme you may not be entitled to access hospital transport.

If you need hospital transport and feel that you are eligible you will need to book it yourself, giving 48 hours' notice. You will need to telephone:-

### West Midlands Ambulance Service

01926 310312 (for bookings only)

01926 488410 (for queries on day of travel only)

### Leicestershire Ambulance Service / Arriva / Ambuline

0845 2669662

## Patient Information

### **Northamptonshire Ambulance / NSL**

0843 2086888

### **Worcestershire Acute Trust Transport Service**

0121 3079116 (for bookings)

01926 310311 (for queries on day of travel)

In most cases you will not be able to bring anyone with you. Whilst your transport will be booked to get you to the hospital for your appointment time this cannot be guaranteed but you will be treated as soon as possible after you arrive. Due to the demand on the hospital transport service patients will often be waiting at the Arden Centre to be taken home for some considerable time. We advise that, where possible, patients make their own travel arrangements. If you have to rely on the hospital transport service, please ensure that you bring food, drinks and any medication that you may need for the day with you. There is a refreshment kiosk available to buy snacks and drinks which is open from 10am-4pm.

## **Transport Schemes**

There are transport schemes operating in some areas. These schemes will charge a mileage rate which varies. For more information please ask to speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

## **Prescriptions**

All cancer patients are entitled to free prescriptions. If you haven't already got an exemption card please ask a member of staff for an application form.

## **Appointments**

The department is usually open from 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday and is closed at weekends and on public holidays.

Radiotherapy treatment machines are very complex; they are maintained by a team of in house physicists and technicians. Delays in treatment can occur due to machine breakdowns and servicing.

## Patient Information

Breaks in treatment due to public holidays and machine maintenance do not affect most people's treatment. However, some patients may be asked to come in for treatment on these days, to avoid a break in treatment, a different treatment machine may be used.

It is not advisable for you to miss any other appointments, but if it is unavoidable please talk to the radiographers who are treating you.

The radiographers arrange treatment appointment times. Every effort will be made to give you times that you prefer, but with a heavy workload this cannot be guaranteed.

It is important that we have a contact telephone number for you as we often have to telephone patients at short notice, about appointments or with other information.

If your telephone is set to bar incoming calls from withheld numbers, please give us an alternative telephone number.

## Counselling

There is a counselling service available at the Arden Centre, for more information speak to your specialist nurse, doctor or radiographer, or telephone 024 7696 7478.

## Complementary Therapy

Aromatherapy, massage, Indian head massage, reiki, reflexology and yoga are available to cancer patients. Therapists are volunteers and provide their services to patients free of charge.

Complementary Therapies are by appointment only, please ask a member of staff, or telephone 024 7696 7290

## Useful telephone numbers:

Reception, Arden Cancer Centre: **024 7696 7272**  
Mon – Fri 8.00am to 5.30pm

Radiotherapy Ward 35: **024 7696 5528**  
Ask to speak to the Nurse in Charge – 24 hours

## Patient Information

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist: **024 7696 7290**  
Monday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

Radiotherapy Planning: **024 7696 7493**

## Information and Support

**Macmillan Cancer Information Centre** 024 7696 6052

We can offer free support, practical advice and information to anyone affected by cancer. No appointments are required and an answering machine facility is available. Open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm, the Centre is located on the ground floor of the main entrance.

**You may find these Macmillan Information booklets useful:**

Understanding Womb (endometrial) Cancer

Understanding Cervical Cancer

Understanding Cancer of the Vulva

Understanding Cancer of the Ovary, Fallopian Tube and Peritoneum

Understanding Chemotherapy

Understanding Radiotherapy

Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women – Managing side effects during treatment

Managing the Late effects of Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women

Cancer and Your Sex Life

**Macmillan Cancer Support National helpline:** 0808 808 00 00  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**NHS 111**

**Cancer Research UK:** 0300 123 1022  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

**Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust:** 0808 802 8000  
[www.jostrust.org.uk](http://www.jostrust.org.uk)

## Patient satisfaction

We hope that you have found this booklet helpful.

We welcome your comments, on the care that you experience, and the service that we offer within the Arden Cancer Centre.

## Patient Information

We ask that specific complaints be addressed to a member of staff so that, in line with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust complaints policy, they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Written by Alison Crichton & Julia Biggs (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists)

With help and advice from the Medical Staff of the Arden Cancer Centre, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, Coventry CV2 2DX

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, we will do our best to meet your needs. Please contact Alison Crichton or Julia Biggs on 024 7696 7290.

This Trust operates a smoke free policy

Help to stop smoking can be obtained from your local NHS Stop Smoking Service: 0300 123 1044

### Document History

Document History	
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