

## Arden Cancer Centre

# Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Radiotherapy to the Oesophagus

### 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.

Radiotherapy is delivered by highly trained staff called Therapy Radiographers on machines called Linear Accelerators.

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/>

### 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.



## Patient Information

### **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 treatment 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.

### **Smoking**

It is strongly recommended that you stop smoking completely whilst undergoing radiotherapy. Smoking can make treatment side effects more severe, the treatment harder to tolerate and less effective. For help to stop smoking call the National smoke free Helpline on 0300 123 1044 or contact the hospital's stop smoking service 02476 964760.

### **Chemotherapy**

Sometimes chemotherapy is given alongside 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.

You will be required to remove your clothing over your chest for your planning visit and subsequent treatment. Only the part of your body that will be treated will be uncovered and every effort will be made to keep you covered where possible. Women having their chest area treated might like

## Patient Information

to wear a small crop top which can then be pulled down when required. Please ask if you are unsure.

If you need treatment to the upper part of your oesophagus, you will be required to wear a mask over your head, neck and shoulders during your treatment. This mask is perforated so that you can see and breathe out of it. This will help you keep very still, and to make sure that you are in the same position daily each time you have your radiotherapy. You will have the mask made on your first visit; a separate information leaflet will be given to you about this.

Following this you will require a planning CT scan at the Arden Centre, which may be done on the same day. If your doctor has requested a mask to be made, you will need to wear this during your CT scan and daily radiotherapy treatments.

There will then be a gap of two to three weeks before your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

### **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. It is very important to maintain the same position of your chest and arms for your daily treatment. You will be asked to lie on the couch and you may be supported by a moulded foam called a vac bag and arm supports during your planning scan and then subsequent treatments.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will be watching you at all times through the window. 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 take some measurements and put small permanent marks on your skin (a tattoo) using ink and a needle.

## Patient Information

These marks are to show exactly where to position you for your treatment and they are permanent.

**Some** patients will be asked to starve, that is to NOT eat or drink for 2 hours before your appointment. The radiographers will then ask you to drink 200mls of water about 30 minutes before the CT scan. This will apply for the CT scan and subsequent treatments.

Every patient's treatment is individual and specifically planned. Your radiotherapy doctor will discuss with you the total number of treatments that you need and how often you will need to attend the department.

### **Contrast**

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.

### **How is the treatment given?**

Radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. You will be asked to remove any clothing from the treatment area and you will be positioned on the treatment couch in the same way as when your treatment was planned.

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 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

## Patient Information

treatment times are very short, but images will be taken beforehand to check that the treatment is correct before it is given. 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 are safe to be near pregnant women and children.

### **Side effects of radiotherapy**

Treatment is painless but can cause some side effects. Treatment affects people in different ways and it can be difficult to predict which side effects will affect you and how severe they will be.

Side effects can be thought of as early (acute) and late (chronic):

#### **Early side effects**

These occur during your treatment and for a short while afterwards.

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

These are usually minimal for this type of treatment, however the following could occur:

- Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction similar to exposure to the sun in the area treated.
- Towards the end of treatment and during the first 1 or 2 weeks after treatment the skin may become red and itchy.

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 moisturiser to the skin in the treatment area two or three times a day, gently smooth it onto your skin until it is absorbed. Do not apply just before treatment.

## Patient Information

- 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 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.
- Avoid any perfumes, aftershaves, or other creams in the treated area.
- Avoid the use of sun lamps, spray tans or skin colouring lotions.
- Avoid using hot water bottles or ice packs in the treatment area.
- Keep the treated area out of the sun during treatment and care should be taken in the future by using a high factor sun cream – factor 30 or above.
- 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.

### **Tiredness:**

- Most people will feel tired as a result of having radiotherapy. Tiredness will often come on gradually as the treatment progresses and may persist for some weeks after the treatment has finished.
- If you feel tired you may need to sleep or rest. However, if you are feeling up to it, regular exercise such as taking a short walk can help with fatigue.

### **Difficulty swallowing and indigestion:**

Food can become difficult to swallow and your oesophagus (food pipe) sore. This can last for a few weeks. You may be advised to have a feeding tube put into your stomach before treatment starts. Softer foods are easier

## Patient Information

to eat such as scrambled eggs, soups and stews. You may find it helpful to avoid hot or spicy foods and alcohol (particularly spirits). You will be referred to the oncology dietitian during your treatment for advice.

### **Loss of appetite:**

Some people find that radiotherapy treatment may change their sense of taste and that they lose their appetite during treatment. Eating little and often can help to maintain your weight.

### **Feeling sick:**

Radiotherapy can cause you to feel sick (nausea) and to be sick (vomiting). This can be treated with medication. You may also experience sickness immediately after swallowing food (regurgitation), please tell the radiographers if this happens.

### **Pain:**

If you experience aches and discomfort in your chest area, painkillers can help to make you feel more comfortable. Your radiotherapy doctor or radiographer will be able to give you more advice. You may find it helpful to take pain relief that is soluble (dissolves in water).

### **Hair loss:**

You may lose chest hair, the hair loss will only occur in the area being treated. This hair loss can be temporary however in some cases this may be permanent. Your consultant or a member of the team will be able to discuss this with you.

### **Blood tests:**

If you are having chemotherapy at the same time as your radiotherapy, you will need to have weekly blood tests.

The side effects of the treatment will start to ease off usually within two to four weeks of the treatment finishing. The full benefit of the treatment is not usually reached until some weeks after the last treatment session.

## Patient Information

### **Late Side Effects**

Long term side effects can occur many months to years after you have completed your treatment. These side effects are hard to predict and if they occur can be permanent. We plan the treatment to avoid the surrounding areas around the tumour as much as possible in order to reduce these effects.

### **Breathlessness**

Radiation can cause inflammation (radiation pneumonitis) and scarring (fibrosis) of the lung. This can occur two to three months after finishing treatment.

### **Narrowing of your food pipe (oesophagus):**

Narrowing of the food pipe is called a stricture, which can cause difficulty swallowing. The stricture can be relieved by a small endoscopic procedure to stretch the narrowing and allow food to pass through easily again.

### **Spinal cord damage:**

This is extremely rare but radiotherapy near the spinal cord carries a risk of nerve damage. Your consultant will discuss this with you if it is relevant.

### **Heart damage:**

Occasionally, radiotherapy to the chest can cause inflammation of the lining surrounding the heart (pericarditis) or some weakening of the heart muscle (myopathy) resulting in chest pain and shortness of breath. This is rare and may require further investigation and treatment.

There is a small risk (1-2% per 10 years following treatment) of developing a second cancer due to radiotherapy.

Please discuss any new symptoms that you experience after your treatment, with your consultant in the follow up clinic.



## Patient Information

If you are concerned about the late effects of radiotherapy treatment, or would like more information, please speak to your Consultant, a member of the medical team or the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

### Treatment reviews

At some point during your treatment you will be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with a therapy radiographer, a consultant, specialist nurse or another member of the team. 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 has been so far at these review sessions for two reasons:

- Firstly, although we take images 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
- 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 to months after the treatment has finished.

### After treatment

The early side effects from the treatment will continue for several weeks to months after the treatment course has been completed.

After finishing treatment, you will receive an appointment to see your consultant. If you haven't received this within 3 weeks of completing treatment please telephone your consultant's secretary.

If you have any problems concerning your radiotherapy treatment you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

### Where is the Arden Centre?

The Arden Centre is situated in the west wing of University Hospital Coventry. We have our own entrance to the left of the main hospital entrance. 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 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).

## Patient Information

### **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)

Thames Ambulance Service – patients with a Leicester GP

0345 241 3012

NSL – for patients with a Northamptonshire GP

0843 208 6888

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.

## Patient Information

### **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.

### **Travel costs**

The NHS Hospital Travel Cost Scheme enables people in receipt of certain benefits or who are on a low income to claim back some of their travel costs. Please ask to speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist for more information.

### **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.

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, when a different treatment machine could 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.

## Patient Information

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, reiki, massage, reflexology and yoga are available to oncology 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

The Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist is available in the department to help you with any queries concerning the above. Please ask at the reception desk.

### **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

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist: **024 7696 7290**

Monday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

Radiotherapy Planning: **024 7696 7493**

## Patient Information

### 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 in the main entrance.

**NHS advice** - use the 111 service

**Macmillan Cancer Support:** 0808 808 00 00

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.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.

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

### Further Information

If you need help, information or advice, either during, or at any time after your course of treatment has finished, please telephone: 024 7696 7290, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm and speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

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

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

## Patient Information

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.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. Please respect other patients and staff and refrain from smoking whilst visiting the hospital.

### Document History

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