

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy information for patients having vaginal vault brachytherapy (post-surgical)

What is brachytherapy?

Vaginal vault brachytherapy is a type of radiotherapy treatment that is delivered using a very small radioactive source close to your surgical site inside the vagina.

It is given through specially designed hollow tubes called applicators, which are inserted into the vagina. Most patients will only need one applicator, but sometimes we may need to use two applicators. During treatment, a radioactive material (usually iridium) is placed inside the applicators. After treatment, the radioactive material is withdrawn from the applicators and then they are removed from the vagina.

At the Arden Cancer Centre we have a high dose rate (HDR) brachytherapy machine which is used to deliver the treatment.

Consent forms

Before you undergo this procedure, you will be required to sign a consent form. This 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

Where is the treatment given?

This takes place in a treatment room in the Arden Cancer Centre. One of the consultant clinical oncologists or a trained practitioner will carry out the procedure. Please be aware that we have both male and female staff working in brachytherapy. There will always be a female chaperone present.

You will be given an out-patient appointment to come to the Arden Cancer Centre. We normally contact you by telephone to arrange this and discuss your treatment further.

You may eat and drink normally beforehand. It is advisable to empty your bladder before your appointment. **Please let us know if you have a latex allergy.**

How is the treatment given?

You will be given a gown and asked to remove your clothing from the waist down before lying on the treatment couch. The doctor will examine you gently to determine the size of vaginal applicator that will be used to deliver the treatment. When the applicator is comfortably in place, the staff will leave the room and treatment will begin.

Generally, treatment lasts between 5 and 20 minutes. You will not feel anything from the treatment.

The brachytherapy team will be able to see you at all times via a television monitor. When the treatment is complete, the applicator will be removed. You can then get dressed and return home. There are normally no immediate aftereffects from this treatment.

Please note – if your doctor examined you in clinic to pre-determine the applicator size, you may not see them during your course of treatment, as your treatments will all be carried out by a trained practitioner.

Patient Information

Will I experience any pain?

This treatment does not cause any pain, but you may feel some discomfort from the applicator. Please tell the staff if you are in any discomfort so they can help you with this.

What are the side effects?

The side effects are normally classed as acute (early) or long term (late). Some patients may have already received external beam radiotherapy before the brachytherapy. These patients may already be experiencing some of the side effects listed below.

Acute side effects

- Fatigue can be a common effect of radiotherapy. If you feel tired you may need to rest, but evidence has shown that gentle exercise can help. More information on this is available from Macmillan Cancer Support.
- You may feel the need to pass urine more often than normal and this may be associated with a stinging sensation. If this persists, take a urine sample to your GP and drink plenty of fluids. Simple analgesia can help.
- You may experience episodes of diarrhoea, an urgent need to open your bowels and occasional rectal bleeding. Medication can be prescribed for you to help with the diarrhoea or can be purchased from a pharmacy. It has been reported that half of patients who have had external beam radiotherapy before brachytherapy will get diarrhoea, and for patients having brachytherapy only, about 1 in 8 may experience diarrhoea.
- Vaginal dryness and soreness can also occur, along with some bleeding from the vagina.
- The above side effects should resolve in time and settle 4 to 6 weeks after the completion of your brachytherapy treatment.

Patient Information

Long term side effects

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

- Vaginal dryness and narrowing. We recommend the use of vaginal dilators following brachytherapy whether or not you are sexually active. If you have not been given information about dilators before the end of your treatment, please tell a member of staff treating you. Vaginal dilators are used to maintain the opening of the vagina, which makes future clinical examinations and sexual intercourse more comfortable for you.
- Bladder changes - can include frequency, reduced bladder capacity and very rarely blood in the urine.
- Bowel changes - can include diarrhoea, urgency, narrowing of the bowel, and very rarely bleeding from the rectum.

Very rarely, bladder or bowel fistulae can develop. This is an abnormal opening between two adjacent organs that are not normally connected. There is about a 1% to 2% chance of this happening.

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.

Sexual relationships

Narrowing of the vagina can occur after radiotherapy, so it is beneficial to use vaginal dilators to make intercourse more comfortable.

We advise that you wait for 2 to 8 weeks following your treatment, and then try using the small dilator to see how comfortable you feel. If you are still sore wait another week and try again. Do this until the soreness settles down at which point you may want to try the next sized dilator or intercourse.

If in any doubt, contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist or the Brachytherapy Radiographer on the numbers at the end of this booklet.

Using a lubricant when intercourse resumes can ease vaginal dryness.

Patient Information

Where is the Arden Centre?

The Arden Centre is part of University Hospital Coventry. The entrance to the Arden Centre is situated 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.

How shall I travel?

By car

You can drive whilst having brachytherapy 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.**

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 travel line on : 0870 608 2608 or visit: www.networkwestmidlands.co.uk.**

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)

Leicestershire Ambulance Service / Arriva / Ambuline

0845 2669662

Northamptonshire Ambulance / NSL

0843 2086888

Worcestershire Acute Trust Transport Service

0300 011 0017

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 make sure 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 to 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.

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.

Follow up appointments

When your course of treatment is complete, you will receive an follow up appointment for in 6 to 12 weeks' time with your doctor. This is to monitor your progress and response to the treatment and for the management of any side effects that you may be experiencing. If you haven't received this within 3 weeks of completing treatment, please telephone the Radiotherapy reception on 024 7696 7272.

If you have any problems before your follow up appointment, please contact the Brachytherapy Radiographer on 024 7696 7294 or Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

Please note. your follow up appointment with your doctor may be either be on the telephone or face to face in the hospital. Check your appointment letter carefully.

Patients who have brachytherapy only will have their initial follow up with their consultant 6 to 12 weeks after completion of treatment but may then be entered into the Patient Initiated Follow Up scheme (PIFU). Further information will be provided about this if it applies to you. Other patients will continue to attend hospital periodically for follow up appointments with a doctor.

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.

Patient Information

Further information

You may find these Macmillan information booklets useful

- Understanding Radiotherapy
- Understanding Pelvic Radiotherapy

Information and support

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 9am to 4pm, the Centre is located on the ground floor in the main entrance.

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 00 00

Website www.macmillan.org.uk

Useful telephone numbers:

Brachytherapy Information and advice:

Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Brachytherapy Radiographer: 024 7696 7294

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists: 024 7696 7290

Arden Cancer Centre

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm - 024 7696 7272

For queries concerning appointments, parking, and ambulance transport.

Acute Oncology (evenings and weekends)

UHCW switchboard 024 7696 4000

Ask to bleep acute oncology on 1641

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's complaints policy, they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 0247 696 7304 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. For help to stop smoking contact UHCW smoking cessation on 0800 122 3780.

Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:

www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback



Document History

Department:	Arden Cancer Centre
Contact:	27304
Updated:	December 2022
Review:	December 2024
Version:	15
Q-pulse:	V12
Reference:	HIC/LFT/378/07