

# A guide to ... attending for Radiotherapy Treatment

Patient Information



**Speciality Medicine**  
Radiotherapy  
and Oncology

We hope you find this booklet helpful; please share it with your family and friends ... it is very important that they feel well informed too.

If you would like to make any comments or suggestions so that our next edition can be improved further, please contact ...

our liaison department 01642 282484 or speak to a member of your health care team.

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## Welcome

... to the Department of Radiotherapy & Oncology at The James Cook University Hospital. The aim of this booklet is to provide you with some general information about your radiotherapy treatment and answer some of the most commonly asked questions.

You will be given more detailed information about your own treatment by the staff looking after you. You may find it helpful prior to your appointment, to make a note (at the back of this booklet) of the things you would like to ask.

### What to bring

Please bring a list of all your current medication **and any medicines you are due to take**, and your reading glasses if worn.

### Facilities

If you require any refreshments during your visit, the hospital voluntary services provide tea, coffee and biscuits most days in the department. There is also a restaurant in the hospital where hot food can be purchased and a coffee shop serving sandwiches, cakes and hot/cold drinks. You will also find various shops (including a newsagent and café) in the main hospital mall.

### How to get here

Follow instructions on the map on the back of this booklet. When you arrive at the hospital site follow signs to either the North Car Park (**V3**) - **limited number of spaces** or two main patient and visitors' car parks on the right (**V1 and V2**). Radiotherapy is given in one of two buildings on the JCUH site. One is in the main hospital building, next to the north entrance and the other is in the Endeavour unit, adjacent to the V3 car park on the north side of the hospital.

When you arrive in the department you will find our reception desk on the right.

**Please let our receptionist know you have arrived; they will check all your details and ask you to wait in the appropriate waiting area.**

If you are visiting the hospital on a regular basis, the Trust can offer you a regular car parking permit at a reduced rate; please ask our receptionist in the department for an application form or speak to a member of your health care team. A deposit for the car park card must be paid at the time of application together with the appropriate fee. This deposit will be refunded when the car parking card is returned to the Travel Link desk in the main hospital mall, (opposite the coffee shop). Your deposit must be claimed within 28 days of the card expiry date.

There will be no charge for cars displaying a disabled persons' parking disc (blue badge); there is a designated car park at the entrance to Main Out-patient Department and Radiotherapy & Oncology and other car parks. If not available, you are welcome to park in a **parking space** in any of the above car parks (**V1, V2 and V3**) without being charged. It will still be necessary to take a ticket from the barrier machine; however any charge will be cancelled by taking your ticket (together with your blue badge) along to the North Reception desk.

If you are struggling to meet the costs of travel for your treatment, there may be help available. To find out if you are eligible, please contact the Macmillan Support & Information Centre, North Entrance, The James Cook University Hospital (telephone 01642 835674). The centre can also provide details of mobility badges (blue badge).

### **Ambulance transport**

At your consultation you will be asked if you require ambulance transport to attend your planning appointment. If this was not discussed, please contact our planning department (01642 854941) informing them also of any special requirements for

example if you will need a stretcher or wheelchair. If there is a medical need, arrangements can be made for you to bring an escort. It is important that we are given 48 hours notice for any ambulance requests.

## What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the treatment of cancer using high energy x-rays generated by electricity or radio-active particles given off by a radio-active source. Radiotherapy can be used alongside other treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. Most of the treatment in this department is given using x-rays; the x-rays can also affect normal tissues in the area treated but they will soon recover. A full explanation will be given to you at your consultation.



## Consent to treatment

The consent process forms a large part of your first consultation with the consultant and health care professionals. It is to ensure that the patient, family and carers receive all the information they need to make an informed decision about whether to go ahead with treatment. The following questions are just some that you may want to ask ...

- what are the benefits of this treatment?
- what are the risks/side effects of this treatment?
- are there any alternatives to this treatment?
- what happens if I do not have this treatment?
- what happens during treatment?

## It is very important that you let us know if you may be pregnant

After your consultation you will be sent an appointment to attend for radiotherapy planning. If you require further information about your treatment or you and your relatives or friends would like the opportunity to see the department before you start your radiotherapy treatment, you may like to attend one of our **Information Evenings**. The evening starts at 6.00pm when an organised tour of the department takes place; you will also be given the opportunity to ask questions.

You will find an invitation to attend an **information evening** available in your welcome pack ... for further information or if you would like to attend, please contact our Liaison Department (telephone 01642 282484 - answer phone available). Unfortunately transport cannot be arranged for these visits.

If you would prefer to visit the department during working hours (when ambulance transport could be arranged if necessary), please feel free to contact our Liaison Department on the above number.

## Complementary therapies

The Holistic Cancer Care Centre (based in the grounds of The James Cook University Hospital) provides a range of supportive therapies to complement orthodox treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. For further information, please speak to a member of your health care team.

## What is treatment planning?

Treatment planning involves the use of a CT scanner or an x-ray machine to identify where we need to treat. The planning of a course of radiotherapy treatment is very important because this ensures each treatment is given accurately. Your treatment is planned by a team of radiographers under the supervision of your consultant.

A CT scanner is a doughnut shaped x-ray machine which is used to take pictures to help us calculate your treatment. Usually the procedure itself takes about 10 minutes and is completely painless. The whole appointment will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes allowing for preparation, dressing and information giving.



Occasionally the consultant will require a more detailed picture and this will involve administering an x-ray dye (contrast) while we carry out the scan. If the x-ray dye is used, you may experience a warm flush as the dye is injected, however this will only last a few seconds and most people experience no ill effects afterwards. Depending on the complexity of your treatment, more than one visit may be required involving further scans or x-rays to ensure accuracy.

## What is the planning room like

The room is quite big and contains a curtained area to give you privacy while getting dressed and undressed. Only the area of the body we are treating needs to be uncovered, the rest of your clothing need not be removed.



### **Can I eat and drink normally before my appointment?**

Yes. If any preparation is needed we will inform you upon arrival.

### **Can I take my normal medication before my appointment?**

Yes, definitely. It is important if you take medication, that you take this as usual and on time. Lying on the x-ray couch which is quite firm, may feel a little uncomfortable by the end of the planning session.

### **Can I bring a relative or friend along with me?**

Of course, although we would ask your escort to wait in the waiting room while we do the planning. You are very welcome to have your escort present when we give you any information before or after the planning or treatment session.

### **Will I have marks?**

We need to put marks on to your skin to ensure we treat you accurately each day. With your permission we will make a few tiny permanent marks on your skin. These are made by putting minute dots of dye just below the surface of the skin and will look like tiny freckles. As these dots cannot be washed off, it enables you to bathe and shower as usual.

If however, you would prefer not to have these tiny permanent dots, we can use a marker pen to draw marks on to your skin. Small pieces of transparent dressing will help to keep the marks in place. The area may then be washed and dried very carefully. If you have any worries about your marks after your planning session, please do not hesitate to ring the planning radiographer (telephone 01642 854941).

Patients who have been advised they will need a mask (also called a shell or mould), will be required to wear this for planning and treatment appointments.

### **Will I have the opportunity to ask questions?**

Although this appointment is not a consultation, if you have any questions or concerns on the planning day, please mention these to the radiographers so they can be dealt with.

### **Will I have treatment the same day?**

If it has been planned for you to have a single treatment, we will try to treat you on the same day to avoid another trip to the hospital. This may mean you have a wait of up to two hours while we calculate your treatment. If you are having more than one treatment, you will probably have received your first treatment appointment in the letter with your planning appointment. If this is not the case, the planning radiographers will arrange an appointment for you before you leave.

### **Treatment appointment times?**

When you start treatment, you will be given the remainder of your appointments.

## What happens when I have my treatment?

A team of radiographers will treat you; all patients starting a course of radiotherapy will be allocated a named staff member who will offer information, advice and support.

You will be asked to lie on the treatment couch and the radiographers use the skin marks to position you in the right place under the treatment machine.

Treatment times are usually very quick; you will be in and out of the treatment room in about 10-15 minutes.



Most of the time is spent in dressing, undressing and getting you into the correct position for treatment; the treatment itself takes only a few minutes.

During your treatment you will feel no pain or discomfort; we ask you just to breathe normally and to keep as still and relaxed as possible. Most machines make a noise when they are operating; this lets you know when the treatment is taking place. Although you will be alone during your treatment, the radiographers will be able to watch you, using a closed circuit television camera and listen via an intercom.

## How often will I have my treatment?

Treatment is usually given every day between Monday and Friday. A course of treatment does not have to start on a Monday and could start mid week; the starting day depends on when the planning of your treatment is completed.

A course of treatment can vary in length; however this will be discussed with you at your first consultation. When attending for your radiotherapy treatment, please book in with our receptionist who will let your treatment unit know you have arrived.

**Will I be radio-active during my course of treatment?**

Definitely not! It is safe for you to be with other people including children and pregnant women during your treatment.

**Treatment review**

Your doctor or radiographer will see you regularly during your treatment in the out-patient clinic. This is to see how you are tolerating the treatment and to discuss any queries you may have.

If you have any concerns before you are due for review, please see your named staff member or a member of your care team.



It is important that you tell us about any medication you are receiving and also if you have to attend other hospital appointments or attend for any other investigations.

## Side effects of radiotherapy?

Many patients complete their course of treatment with few side effects and are able to continue working and lead a completely normal life throughout the whole period.

Some courses of treatment however may cause some side effects but these vary considerably depending on the treatment area and of course, the individual patient. When you start your treatment, the radiographers will give you further information about any side effects you may have and offer relevant advice. This may differ from instructions given to other patients. Please listen to what the radiographer tells you and feel free to ask any questions.

### Tiredness and fatigue

Some patients say they feel more tired and lethargic than usual and this may increase as your treatment continues. This is due to the effects of the radiotherapy, travelling each day and the way people feel. Generally your energy levels will return to normal four to eight weeks after treatment finishes, but sometimes fatigue can continue for several months; please ask a member of staff for more information. It is important to recognise symptoms of fatigue, as there is help available.

### Skin reactions

A common side effect of radiotherapy is reddening of the skin in the treatment area - this is called erythema. This may be so mild as to go unnoticed or your skin could become quite pink dependent upon your treatment. You will be given further advice about different skin reactions and the best way to care for your skin when you start treatment. Most skin reactions are temporary and settle down within a few weeks after treatment has finished.

## **Hair loss**

Any hair that is included in the treatment area or where the x-rays leave the body, may fall out; this usually grows back some months later. Your doctor or radiographer will discuss this with you if you are affected; wigs are available through the hospital - please speak to your nurse/radiographer.

## **Nausea (feeling sick)**

A few patients may feel a bit sickly during treatment depending on the area being treated. If this happens, please tell the radiographers, we may be able to give you some medication that will help.

## **Your appetite and diet**

Some people lose their appetite and find food tastes different to normal. It is important to try and have a good nourishing diet. You may find that small frequent meals are more appetising than a large meal. Try and drink plenty of fluids especially if you don't feel like eating much. Your radiographer or nurse can give you more advice about your diet; they may even suggest you talk to our dietitian.

## **Your emotions**

During treatment some patients feel stressed, anxious, depressed and at times feel unable to cope. Please let us know if you feel like that; it certainly helps to talk about the way you feel. We can offer you appropriate help and advice and we may be able to refer you to specially trained staff to help you cope better.

## **Blood tests**

So that we can monitor your general health throughout your treatment, you may have regular blood tests. Sometimes the treatment can cause your blood count to change.

## What happens after my treatment is finished?

When you have finished your treatment you may find that some of the effects continue for some time. During this time, it is important to continue to take good care of yourself, eating well and resting if you feel tired. Most side effects are temporary and settle down after a few weeks; however some effects may be permanent.

### Late or permanent effects

It is possible that some side effects of treatment may occur months or years after treatment has finished, although improvements in treatment means this is less common these days. Your consultant, radiographer or nurse will discuss any late effects with you and give you further written information if they are likely to occur.

### Returning to work

Many patients ask if they can return to work; this is perfectly all right providing you feel you can cope and your doctor has not advised you otherwise.

### Your feelings

You might feel that you can now begin to put your cancer and your treatment behind you and may be surprised that your emotional recovery is only just beginning. It is important at this stage that you know where you can get further information and support and realise that you are not alone - see [useful contacts](#) or speak to a member of your health care team.

### Follow up

After your treatment has finished you will be given an appointment for a follow up visit, usually at the hospital where you saw your oncologist for your first consultation.

This visit will give you the opportunity to discuss any problems or worries that may have arisen and to see how any side effects are settling down; it may help to make a list beforehand so that you don't forget anything important.

How often you have these checks will vary depending on your consultant, but as time goes by they will become less frequent. Your consultant will keep in contact with your own doctor so he or she will know about your progress.

## Contact us ...

If you have any concerns about any treatment reactions on completion of your radiotherapy, please seek advice in the first instance from your GP who will have received a letter from the department with details of your treatment, expected reactions and medication that may be given. If your GP cannot advise you then please contact our ....

Patient liaison office (telephone 01642 282484 - answer phone available) Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm, who will take details of your concerns and contact the appropriate health care professional that managed your treatment. It may be that we are able to offer you advice straight away; however, sometimes it may be necessary for us to phone you back later. If there is a particular member of staff that you wish to speak to, please state their name and we will ask them to contact you as soon as possible.

If you require advice outside normal working hours and have been unable to contact your GP, you can speak to a member of staff on the oncology ward at The James Cook University Hospital (telephone 01642 854019) who may be able to help you.



## Useful contacts

### Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

The Macmillan Cancer Information & Support Centre, North Entrance, The James Cook University Hospital (telephone 01642 835674) offers a drop in centre for benefits advice, cancer information and practical or emotional support to anyone who has cancer, their relatives, friends and carers. For further information, please speak to a member of your health care team.

### Macmillan helpline

(free phone 0808 808 00 00) Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm or via email [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**Hard of hearing?** Use text phone 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay

**Non English Speaker?** Interpreters are available.

**NHS Direct** - [www.nhs.direct.uk](http://www.nhs.direct.uk)

**The Royal College of Radiologists** - [www.rcr.ac.uk](http://www.rcr.ac.uk) - click on link "patients and carers" for options including viewing a virtual oncology department and patient information..

### Other useful numbers/helplines

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## Concerns/Suggestions/Queries

If you have a concern or query about the care you or your relative/carer is receiving or any aspect of our service, please raise it with a member of your health care team or our patient liaison officer here in the Department of Radiotherapy and Oncology.

It may be that you would like to talk this through with someone outside the department, if this is the case, you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). This service aims to advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out any problems quickly on your behalf. Please ask a member of staff for further information.

### Confidentiality

We will not give out information about you or your illness to anyone except your GP without your permission. Under certain circumstances you have a right to see information about yourself which is held by us. This would be under the terms of the Access to Health Records Act or the Data Protection Act. If you would like further details, please contact the Health Records Manager (telephone 01642 854789).

### Supervision of children

The Trust cannot take any responsibility for the care of children when accompanying patients who are attending the department for a clinic appointment or treatment. The patients must therefore make alternative arrangements to ensure children are supervised at all times whilst in the department.



## Comments, compliments, concerns or complaints

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is concerned about the quality of care you receive and strives to maintain high standards of health care.

However we do appreciate that there may be an occasion where you, or your family, feel dissatisfied with the standard of service you receive. Please do not hesitate to tell us about your concerns as this helps us to learn from your experience and to improve services for future patients.

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This service aims to advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out problems quickly on your behalf.

This service is available at The James Cook University Hospital and the Friarage Hospital Northallerton, please ask a member of staff for further information.



Author/s: staff of the radiotherapy department and staff and volunteers of the macmillan cancer information centre

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