



# Oesophageal brachytherapy

This leaflet explains what happens when you have brachytherapy to your oesophagus (gullet).

It is a guide to help you understand more about this type of treatment and the procedure involved.

The cancer specialist is in charge of your care, and during this leaflet, we will refer to him/her as the oncologist. The oncologist in charge of the brachytherapy will see you some time before your treatment, and explain the procedure to you.

You will also have the chance to discuss your treatment beforehand with the brachytherapy staff.

If you wish, you can see the room where the treatment is given.

You could be seen by both male and/or female radiographers when you have your treatment.

## What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is a form of radiotherapy given by directly introducing a radiation source into the part of your body to be treated. The brachytherapy machine uses a small radioactive source which produces gamma rays.

It may only be necessary to give the treatment on its own, or it may be given following a course of radiotherapy.

The oncologist will decide and explain which treatment is best for you.

## What does the treatment involve?

Usually you will be treated as an outpatient and the whole procedure will take about an hour, although the actual treatment will only take 10 - 25 minutes.

- You may eat and drink normally both before and after the treatment, but we do not advise you to have a large meal within two hours of your appointment time.
- You will not require a general anaesthetic but the doctor may spray the back of your throat and nostril with a local anaesthetic before passing a small tube (nasogastric) up your nose and down the back of your throat into your oesophagus (gullet).
- You will then be taken to the radiotherapy CT Simulator where a scan will be taken to check the tube is in the right position. Once the scan has been done, you will be taken to the treatment room.
- You may be able to sit up for the treatment. The tube in your oesophagus will be connected to the machine. The radioactive source travels along this tube by remote control.
- The staff will leave the room while the treatment is in progress. However, they will be watching you on a TV screen in the control area nearby, and will also be able to talk to you via an intercom.
- As each patient is different, your treatment is worked out especially for you. The actual treatment time will therefore vary, but will usually last between 10 and 25 minutes.
- At the end of the treatment the radioactive source is withdrawn back into the machine by remote control and the staff will then come back into the room.
- The tube is removed after the treatment. This is completely painless, and you may then go home. However, we strongly advise you to arrange for a responsible adult to go home with you.

## Are there any side-effects?

Some patients experience a little soreness in their oesophagus when they have had the treatment. It also may be slightly uncomfortable to swallow solid food.

If this happens, try dissolving two soluble aspirins in a small amount of water and drink it slowly, about 20 minutes before you eat.

However, if you already take aspirin for any other reason please ask before taking more. If you still find it difficult to swallow, liquidising your food may help.

Soft ice-cream is both soothing and nourishing. There are also a number of high protein preparations, which can be bought at any chemist. Try to eat a little often, rather than large meals.

Our hospital dietitian is available to advise you, and we have leaflets in our 'Helpful Hints' series which you may find useful.

Try to increase your fluid intake after your treatment. Drink plenty of tea, coffee and milk based fluids (but not too hot), water, fruit squash and other refreshing drinks.

Do not drink undiluted spirits, but beer and wine in moderation are not harmful.

If you have any further questions or problems, please do not hesitate to ask the oncologist, nurse or radiographer.

## Contacts

If you have any queries about the information in this leaflet, please contact the:

Brachytherapy Unit: ..... 020 3826 2629

Brachytherapy Clinic Nurses:..... 020 3826 2186

Radiotherapy Clinic Radiographers: ..... 020 3826 2612

**At other times, call the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre 24-hour Emergency Advice Line:  
07825 028855**

## Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

## Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet and your hospital name band each time you attend. You must wear your name band at all times whilst in hospital.

## If you normally pay for NHS prescriptions

People undergoing treatment for cancer do not have to pay NHS prescription charges if they have a valid medical exemption certificate.

To get an exemption certificate, ask your GP for an application form.

## Pregnancy/fathering a child

Female patients must not be pregnant or become pregnant and male patients must not father a child during a course of radiotherapy or for some months afterwards. **Please discuss this with your cancer specialist.**

If you think there is a chance, however small, of you or your partner being pregnant during treatment, it is extremely important that you discuss this with your oncologist, radiographer or nurse as soon as possible.

Female patients will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status prior to radiotherapy. This applies to all women between the ages of 12-55 years. This is a legal requirement.

## Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, including the supportive services offered at the LJMC, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you and include healthcare professionals and trained volunteers. The centre provides a relaxed setting in which to talk and ask questions.

The LJMC is situated between the main Cancer Centre building and Gate 3 (White Hill).

 **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre**  
*... supporting people affected by cancer...*

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- ① Drop-in centre
- ① Telephone helpline
- ① Benefits advice\*
- ① Complementary therapies\*
- ① Relaxation classes
- ① Counselling\*
- ① Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- ① The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- ① Self-help courses

\* These services are only available to NHS patients under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Mon-Fri: **9.30am-1.00pm & 2.00-4.30pm**

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: **www.ljmc.org**