

## Radiotherapy Department

# Superficial Radiotherapy

July 2021

**Great Staff – Great Care – Great Future**

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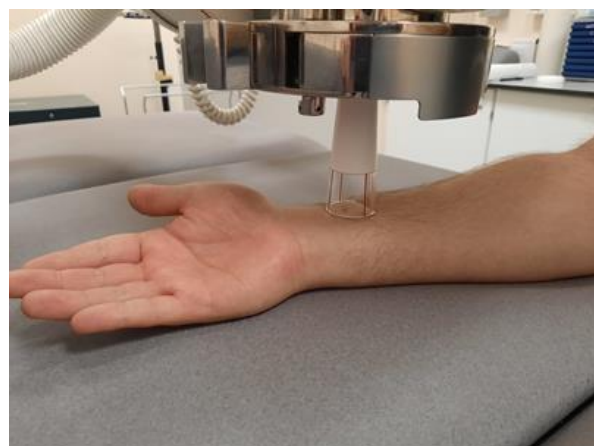
### Introduction

This leaflet has been produced to give you general information in relation to superficial radiotherapy. Most of your questions should be answered by this leaflet. It is not intended to replace the discussion between you and the healthcare team, but may act as a starting point for discussion. If after reading it you have any concerns or require further explanation, please discuss this with a member of the healthcare team.

### What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of X-rays to treat cancer and some benign conditions, in this case, low energy X-rays ensure superficial (shallow) penetration of the skin. This type of X-rays focuses on the precise area for treatment which has previously been decided by your consultant. Your consultant will have also prescribed the most effective type treatment for you and this may differ from one person to the next. It is likely that you will require more than one treatment.

### Images of the Superficial Treatment Machine



(Photos: Hull University Teaching Hospitals Radiotherapy Department)

## **Before your Radiotherapy Treatment**

Initially you will see the consultant in a clinic and your treatment options will be discussed. If you decide to proceed with radiotherapy you will be given another appointment approximately one week later. At this appointment the area which is going to undergo treatment will be 'marked up'. This means your consultant will decide the precise treatment area on your body and the details will be recorded. This may involve your consultant drawing on your skin with a temporary marker pen, making a template, taking measurements and taking photographs. It is advised that if the area to be treated is on your face to wear minimal amount of make-up, as it may have to be removed in order to define the precise treatment area. Once all of this process is complete, the treatment can be planned and any further equipment, such as shielding, to protect areas we want to avoid treating, can be made. The shielding if required is very small and can be placed easily onto your skin. Your treatment will start approximately one week later.

For some patients, whose treatment is near to the eye, it may be necessary to use an internal eye shield to protect the eye. This would involve eye-drops being administered to numb your eye, prior to the shield being inserted. The shield is inserted under your eyelid, just like a contact lens.

The 'mark-up' appointment is generally a much longer appointment than the treatment appointments and can take about 1 hour depending upon if any shielding or accessories are required for your individual treatment.

## **How is my Radiotherapy treatment given?**

Superficial radiotherapy is a quick, simple and painless process. You will be positioned on the treatment couch and we will try and make you as comfortable as possible. The machine will then be positioned over the area to be treated and will make light contact with the skin. Once the machine has been set up the radiographers will stand in the control room, which is next to the treatment room and they will be able to observe you at all times through the window.

## **How long will the Radiotherapy treatment take?**

Your appointment will be approximately 15 minutes, but this may vary depending on the complexity of the treatment.

## **How often will I have to undergo Radiotherapy treatment?**

The number of radiotherapy treatments you require will vary according to your treatment prescription, typically between 5 and 20. These will be given daily (but not at weekends). Your treatment will normally be performed as an outpatient procedure and your course of treatment will depend on the type of cancer, its location and size.

## **Are there any short- or long-term side effects?**

During radiotherapy treatment the area which is being treated may gradually become red. You may also experience some irritation and in some cases the area may discharge a little and form scabs. During your period of treatment, you will be regularly reviewed and skin care advice will be given to you at every step of the way. The effects of the treatment will continue for approximately four weeks after completion of your course.

Long term effects can take several years to develop and could include; skin colour alterations in the area treated, skin atrophy (thinning of the skin); increased sensitivity to the sun and telangiectasia (enlarged thin walled blood vessels close to the surface of the skin).

### **Skin care advice to be followed before and after your treatment**

Prior to your treatment you will be given advice about how to look after your skin whilst on treatment in order to minimise any side effects. During your course of treatment, the radiographers will monitor the area being treated and refer you to the radiotherapy support team if required.

Please see the 'Skin Care during Radiotherapy' leaflet that you will have been given prior to starting your course of treatments.

### **What will happen afterwards?**

Once your treatment is finished you will be given further advice about how to care for your skin and what you can expect in the next few weeks. A follow up appointment will also be made for you, approximately 8 weeks after you finish and you can then discuss your progress with your consultant at this appointment.

Should you require further advice on the issues contained in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to contact the Radiotherapy Support Team **(01482) 461206** Monday - Friday 8.00am – 6.00pm, excluding weekends and Bank Holidays or by email: [hyp-tr.radiotherapy.information@nhs.net](mailto:hyp-tr.radiotherapy.information@nhs.net)

Please read the information leaflet. Share the information it contains with your partner and family (if you wish) so that they can be of help and support. There may be information they need to know, especially if they are taking care of you following this examination.

### **Research**

The hospital is a research-active Trust with a research strategy that includes cancer treatment and care. The radiotherapy department participates in national and international research studies to improve treatments to make them safer, more effective and to reduce side effects. We also develop patient-centered local research to improve your radiotherapy experience to benefit you and your family. We would like to encourage you to feedback about your experiences and ideas to help us to research the areas that are important to you. Your treatment will not be affected in any way should you not wish to take part.

### **Pregnancy**

It is advisable that women do not become pregnant while having cancer treatment because the radiotherapy/chemotherapy/immunotherapy can have an effect on the unborn child. It is suggested that you use a barrier form of contraception (e.g. condoms). Please speak with your healthcare team if you have any questions.

## **Radiotherapy Staff**

### **Clinical Oncologist, Registrar, Consultant Therapeutic Radiographers**

They are experts in radiotherapy and will be managing your treatment. They will take the responsibility for deciding what dose and how many treatments will be best for you; they will oversee the planning of your treatment. You may see them or a member of their team at your initial planning appointment and you can see them during your treatment if you have any problems or queries.

### **Therapeutic Radiographers**

Radiotherapy is delivered by male and female therapeutic radiographers who are specialist healthcare professionals that are trained to plan and deliver radiotherapy treatment and to use the specialist equipment. You will usually see the same team of radiographers and they will assist you with any questions or problems or refer you to a more appropriate person.

### **Radiotherapy Support Team**

The team consists of nurse practitioners, registered nurses, radiographers and clinical support workers (CSW's), who are based within the Radiotherapy Department where they actively support and advise patients receiving radiotherapy treatment. They offer advice to patients, their families and carers and are able to make appropriate referrals.

### **Physicists, Planning Dosimetrists and Machine Technicians**

Medical physicists are specialist scientists who have a key role in the individual planning of your treatment, along with the planning technicians. They may also have an input into the arrangement of your treatment. They work together with the machine technicians to ensure that the machines are reliable and working accurately.

### **Students**

At some point during your treatment you may encounter student radiographers. Everything they do is supervised fully. If you would prefer our students not to be present during the planning and treatment, please let a member of staff know when you attend for your initial planning appointment.

### **Other members of staff**

During your treatment course you may meet our receptionists, dieticians, oncology health staff, patient services staff, porters, volunteer workers. All are working together to provide you with a high quality of healthcare.

## Useful Contacts

### Cancer Psychological Service

The primary aim of our health centre is to help patients and their families to have the best possible health and quality of life during and after treatment. It is open to all oncology patients and their families in offering an informal atmosphere to those who wish to “drop in” to the centre. Specially trained staff are able to advise on different aspects of coping with cancer. The centre is located in the Queen’s Centre, Castle Hill Hospital. Opening times are Monday – Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm.

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Provide information from specialist nurses on all aspects of cancer and its treatment, and on the practical and emotional aspects of living with cancer.

You can drop into the Macmillan Cancer Information Centre at the Queen’s Centre or call them on **(01482) 461154** Monday – Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm.

Alternatively, free phone the national help line: 0808 808 0000 Monday – Friday 9.00am - 8.00pm.

Online: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk>

Write to Macmillan Cancer Support, 89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7UQ

### General advice and Consent

Most of your questions should have been answered by this leaflet, but remember that this is only a starting point for discussion with the healthcare team.

### Consent to Treatment

Before any doctor, nurse or therapist examines or treats you, they must seek your consent or permission. In order to make a decision, you need to have information from health professionals about the treatment or investigation, which is being offered to you. **You should always ask them more questions if you do not understand or if you want more information.**

For radiotherapy, you will be given both verbal and written information and after having time to ask questions, you will be asked to sign a consent form to show you have received enough information and you understand it. The information you receive should be about your condition, the alternatives available to you, and whether it carries risks as well as the benefits. What is important is that your consent is genuine or valid. That means:

- you must be able to give your consent
- you must be given enough information to enable you to make a decision
- you must be acting under your own free will and not, under the strong influence of another person.

## **Information about you**

We collect and use your information to provide you with care and treatment. As part of your care, your information will be shared between members of the healthcare team, some of whom you may not meet. Your information may also be used to help train staff, to check the quality of our care, to manage and plan the health service and to help with research. Wherever possible we use anonymous data.

We may pass on relevant information to other health or social organisations that provide you with care. All information is treated as strictly confidential and is not given to anyone who does not need it. If you have any concerns please ask your doctor, or the person caring for you.

Under the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 we are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any information we hold about you. For further information visit the following page: [Confidential Information about You. www.hey.nhs.uk/privacy/data-protection](http://www.hey.nhs.uk/privacy/data-protection)

If you or your carer needs information about your health and wellbeing and about your care and treatment in a different format, such as large print, braille or audio, due to disability, impairment or sensory loss, please advise a member of staff and this can be arranged.

This leaflet was produced by the Radiotherapy Department, Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and will be reviewed in **July 2024**.

**Ref: HEY315/2021**