
An introduction to the Cancer Genetics Unit

Patient Information



Introduction

The Cancer Genetics Unit provides genetic and medical information and support to people and their families who are concerned about their personal or family history of cancer.

Common concerns include:

- Am I at risk of developing cancer because of my family history?
- Am I at risk of developing another cancer?
- Should I have more regular screening because of my family history?
- Is there a genetic predisposition to cancer in my family?
- Is genetic testing available to me?
- Are my children at risk?

Is it common to have a gene in a family causing a predisposition to developing cancer?

No, to have a single gene causing a predisposition to developing cancer in a family is uncommon. As cancer is such a common condition, it is not unusual for more than one family member to develop cancer.

What happens at the Cancer Genetics Unit?

Following a referral from your doctor, you will receive a family history questionnaire to complete at home. It will either be a paper form which you can return to us in the post or you will be sent a secure link to complete an online form.

The information contained in the questionnaire will help us assess if your family has an increased risk of developing cancer. If you have any problems filling it in or getting the information requested, you can telephone us on 020 8661 3375 to discuss your queries.

Questionnaires will be reviewed by one of our Cancer Genetics team and an appointment may be offered, if clinically appropriate. We offer telephone, video or face to face appointments. We have clinics at both the Chelsea and Sutton branches of The Royal Marsden.

Our clinical team consists of genetic counsellors, specialist nurses and specialist doctors.

During an initial appointment we may:

- Talk through your personal and/or family history of cancer and clarify certain details
- Discuss our genetic assessment of your family history and cancer screening recommendations for you and other family members (referrals may be made for screening to be put in place)
- Possibly ask if a cancer diagnosis can be verified to help with the accuracy of your assessment (for example, ask if copies of death certificates can be obtained or arrange to get consent to allow us to see an individual's medical records)
- Discuss and arrange genetic testing, where appropriate
- Discuss any particular concerns or questions you may have.

This initial appointment may be all that is necessary for you. If a further consultation is appropriate, we will offer you a follow up appointment. The reason for a further appointment may be:

- To make a further assessment once cancer diagnoses have been checked
- To further explore the option of genetic testing
- To discuss the results of genetic testing
- To discuss in greater detail cancer risk management options.

Other activities of the Cancer Genetics Unit

As cancer genetics is a rapidly developing speciality, research studies are an important part of our role. You may choose to participate in one of our research studies. Your decision to participate is voluntary and will not in any way affect your care.

Will the information I provide be available to anyone else?

We assure you the information you provide about yourself and your family will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Information will be shared with your doctors with your consent. We will not contact other members of your family directly.

What if English is not my first language?

Translators can be arranged for appointments although we need at least two weeks notice for our secretaries to make the arrangements.

My Marsden

The MyMarsden patient portal allows patients to access their healthcare records from their computer, tablet or smartphone. For more information see www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/mymarsden

Contact details

Our administrative offices are based in the Sutton branch of The Royal Marsden and our secretaries and genetic team can be contacted on:

020 8661 3375

cancergenetics@rmh.nhs.uk

www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk

Notes and questions

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

The patient information service is generously supported by The Royal Marsden Charity.

royalmarsden.org

Registered Charity No.1095197



Revised August 2025. Planned review August 2028
© The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust GE-0959-10



Radiotherapy and
Chemotherapy Services
F538021 & F538022

