

## Having gynaecological brachytherapy - for those who have not had a hysterectomy

### What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is a type of internal radiation treatment (radiotherapy) which is given by placing plastic or metal tubes (applicators) close to the area to be treated. A machine called an HDR microSelectron is connected to the tubes to deliver the radiation to the area around the applicators. Brachytherapy can be given in addition to external beam radiotherapy or on its own.

Gynaecological brachytherapy is treatment to the female genital tract and may include the vagina, cervix and uterus. You will not be able to feel the treatment and you will not be radioactive afterwards.

### Preparation for your treatment

A week before your procedure you will have a pre-operative anaesthetic assessment. At this appointment, we will give you details about your admission and restrictions on eating and drinking before your anaesthetic.

### Treatment

The brachytherapy applicators are positioned inside the womb (uterus) and vagina in an operating theatre under general anaesthetic or spinal anaesthetic. The choice of anaesthetic will be discussed with you. The applicators will remain in position until all the treatment is completed. This means staying in hospital overnight where you will need to remain in bed. You will be unable to sit upright for the time the applicators are inside you, although you may bend your knees up for comfort. You will have a catheter inserted into your bladder and be given medication to prevent you needing to open your bowels. CT and MRI scans are performed once the applicators are in position. These will be used to plan the treatment.

The treatment itself will be delivered in the brachytherapy suite in the Radiotherapy Department and will usually take place on a Wednesday afternoon, followed by a further session on Thursday morning. The applicators will be removed in the brachytherapy suite after the last treatment. The procedure will be repeated the following week.

### Procedure

- Admission to the day surgery unit will be on Wednesday morning at 7.30am. You will have some blood tests carried out before the procedure.



- We will take you to the operating theatre for the procedure between 8am–9am on Wednesday morning. If we have two cases scheduled, you may be asked to arrive later and will go to theatre later as well.
- When you wake up you will find the applicators and some gauze ribbon have been placed in your vagina. There will also be a soft rubber catheter in your bladder with a bag to collect urine attached.
- Once you have recovered from the anaesthetic, you will be taken to have a CT scan in the radiotherapy department
- This will be followed by an MRI scan in the radiology department
- You will then return to the ward where you can eat and drink normally
- Your treatment will be planned using the scans you have had. We usually have the plan ready for you to have treatment by 5pm although, again, if we have two cases the second treatment may only be ready later (5.30pm-7pm).
- Treatment is delivered in the brachytherapy suite in the radiotherapy department
- You can have the treatment while lying on the trolley that brought you from the ward
- During the treatment you will be alone in the room although there is a CCTV and intercom link to the control area (please be assured that this is a live feed to ensure your safety; no recordings are made)
- The brachytherapy treatment machine is connected to the applicators to deliver the treatment
- The treatment time can vary from six to 15 minutes for each treatment. The treatment is completely painless. Once the treatment has completed, you will return to the ward where you will stay overnight with the applicators still in place.
- On Thursday morning you will attend for a further treatment
- After the final treatment, the gauze ribbon and applicators will be removed. Removal can be uncomfortable but takes less than five minutes. You will have some pain medication on the ward before you come down and we can give you Entonox (gas and air) to help.
- There may be some light bleeding after the procedure but this will settle quickly. You can continue with all your usual activities. It is not necessary to adjust your diet.

### Feminine care

You will be advised about feminine care when you return for follow up 4–6 weeks after treatment. Please see The Royal Marsden factsheet *Feminine care for women having pelvic radiotherapy* for further information. At the end of your treatment, please ensure that you have a follow up appointment to attend.

### Contact details

If you feel unsure about anything, please discuss it further with the team treating you, and do not hesitate to call the hospital once your treatment is completed if you need advice.

PA to Clinical Oncologist	020 7808 2581	(Chelsea)
PA to Clinical Oncologist	020 8661 3272	(Sutton)



Alternatively, please call:

**The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:**  
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

020 8915 6899

