

Contacts

If you are unable to keep any appointments, or have any questions concerning your appointment, please telephone the Wellington Blood & Cancer Centre as soon as possible.

Radiation Treatment Department
Level 2
Wellington Blood & Cancer Centre
Wellington Regional Hospital
Private Bag 7902
Riddiford St
Newtown

Telephone: 04 806 2000

Monday - Friday: 8am – 4:30pm

Brachytherapy Suite: 04 806 2024

5 North Ward oncology nurses are available for **urgent after hours advice** related to your treatment. This is after 4:30pm and on weekends. **Please call: 04 806 0418**

Information for Patients Receiving Brachytherapy for Endometrial Cancer

Radiation Treatment Department

Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre

Introduction

Your doctor has recommended a course of brachytherapy as part of your treatment. This booklet will give you information about:

- What is brachytherapy?
- Who will I meet?
- What will my brachytherapy treatment involve?
- Possible side effects
- Parking, accommodation and transport to the hospital
- What will happen after treatment?

Treatment is given at the Radiation Treatment Department at the Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre on level 2 of Wellington Hospital. Please report to reception on arrival and check in. If you are arriving for your appointment early and the doors are locked, please ring the doorbell on the wall to the right of the doors. A member of the team will meet you and bring you through to the brachytherapy area.

Smoking

If you smoke, we strongly advise you to stop smoking as this can worsen the side effects of treatment. You may find this very difficult. Please speak to your treatment team about support available to help with this.

Contraception during and after Radiation Treatment

If you are a woman of childbearing age, it is important that you do not become pregnant during your treatment. This is because radiation treatment given during pregnancy can harm a developing baby. Before starting treatment you will need to confirm that you aren't pregnant and that you understand you should avoid becoming pregnant during treatment (this means you will need to use a reliable form of birth control if you are sexually active). You can ask your doctors for information about this.

Support Services

Please ask a member of your treatment team if you would like more information or to access any of these services.

- Cancer Society
- Counselling (general / relationship / sexual issues)
- Social work
- Support groups
- Massage
- Fit for Life
- Chaplains

General Advice

- Personal hygiene is important so please bathe or shower regularly. Use a soft towel and pat the skin dry rather than rubbing it. You can continue using your usual soap/shower gel.
- Wear loose cotton or silk underwear. Natural fibres are usually better tolerated.
- Do not use talcum powder in the groin area.
- Do not go in a swimming or spa pool until your reactions have completely settled.

Tiredness

Some people experience tiredness during their treatment. This can be caused by a number of factors – travelling to and from treatment, change in routine, other treatment you might have had recently and the brachytherapy treatment itself. You may require a nap in the afternoon or to take time off work. Please let your treatment team know if you are tired or are having trouble sleeping. If your sleeplessness is caused by anxiety then the Cancer Society may be able to help with counselling.

What will Happen After Treatment?

Reactions usually peak about 1-2 weeks after treatment finishes. Most people find these start to resolve 3-6 weeks after treatment. A follow-up appointment with the doctor will be given to you.

What is Brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is the use of specialised radiation to treat cancer. For this treatment, radiation is delivered close to or inside the tumour site by a radiation source contained within special applicators.

The advantage of brachytherapy is that radiation doses do not need to pass through the body from outside, like external beam radiation therapy does. The radiation is therefore confined much more closely to the treatment area and allows a higher dose of radiation to be given to the cancer with less damage to normal surrounding tissues. Treatment plans are designed to suit your individual needs. Between 3-6 treatments are usually given once or twice a week.

Your doctor will tell you how many treatments you require. Brachytherapy may be given alone or in combination with external beam radiation therapy.

Who will I meet?

Radiation Oncologist: A Radiation Oncologist is a doctor who has specialised in looking after patients with cancer, in particular, involving the use of radiation therapy. Your Radiation Oncologist decides whether brachytherapy is required, how it should be delivered as well as the number of treatments needed.

Radiation Oncology Registrar: A Radiation Oncology Registrar is a doctor who is currently training to become a specialist. The Registrar works closely with your Radiation Oncologist

Radiation Therapist: Radiation therapists are involved at each stage of your treatment. They organise your appointments and will meet you before your planning session to explain the process. The radiation therapists also plan and deliver your radiation treatment.

Medical Physicist: Medical Physicists are involved in maintaining the brachytherapy machines and work with the doctors and radiation therapists to achieve the best treatment plan for you.

Anaesthetist: Anaesthetists are specialist doctors who are responsible for providing anaesthesia for operations and procedures. You may see an anaesthetist during your anaesthetic pre-assessment. You may also be reviewed by the anaesthetist the morning of your brachytherapy procedure.

Nurse: Radiation nurses will see you during your pre-assessment and pre-treatment appointments. They will also be involved in your care the day of your brachytherapy procedure/s.

Gynae-Oncologist: A Gynae-Oncologist is a doctor who specialises in the management of gynaecological cancers (cancers of the female reproductive system). A Gynae-Oncologist may be present at your brachytherapy to assist with the insertion of the applicators.

Possible Side Effects

Treatment is generally well tolerated. If you have had external beam pelvic radiation treatment the side effects of this treatment are very similar to those you may have experienced. Please inform your treatment team if you notice any of the following symptoms.

Urinary Symptoms

Your bladder may become irritated, reactions may include:

- Urinating more often (this may be more noticeable at night)
- Stinging or burning while urinating
- Difficulty urinating

If you have these symptoms there are ways you can help:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Drinking cranberry juice

Bowel Irritation

Patients having this treatment often notice changes in their bowel habits. You may become constipated or more commonly, your bowel motions may become looser.

Vaginal Reactions

During treatment, the tissues in the vagina can become pink and inflamed. Your vagina may feel tender, dry or bleed easily.

As the irritation heals, scar tissue can cause your vagina to become less elastic, shorter, narrower or too close. To help prevent this from happening you can use vaginal dilators. A dilator is like a plastic tampon that comes in four sizes. These are designed to be inserted into the vagina to keep it healthy and supple and to reduce the risk of scarring and shortening/narrowing. One of the Radiation Therapists will provide you with a set of dilators and explain how to use them.

Treatment

When your plan is ready you will be wheeled on your bed back into the brachytherapy treatment room. The applicators are attached to the brachytherapy machine by thin tubes.



Once everything is in place the treatment team will leave the room. You will hear a beeping noise and a door close as they leave. They will be watching you on cameras and can hear you if you want to talk to someone.

The radioactive source then travels down the tube into the applicator. You will **not** feel anything when the treatment is happening. The treatment will take about 15 minutes.

After treatment is completed the doctor will remove the applicators and bladder catheter. You will be taken back to the bed bay area and will be looked after by the nurses until you are ready to be discharged. You will **not** be radioactive after the treatment and you will be able to have contact with people as normal.

You will need to have someone to collect you and stay with you over night after each brachytherapy treatment. In some cases you may need to stay in hospital overnight. Your doctor will discuss this with you if necessary.

What will my brachytherapy treatment involve?

Before starting your brachytherapy, you will:

- Attend an appointment with your brachytherapy team to assess whether you can manage the applicator insertion and treatment positions.
- Meet with your Radiation Therapist to discuss your brachytherapy appointments.
- Meet with your Radiation Oncologist to discuss your brachytherapy and sign consent.
- You may need to meet with an Anaesthetist prior to your brachytherapy to assess whether support from the Anaesthetic team during the insertion procedure is a suitable option for you.

On the day of your brachytherapy

Please arrive at the Radiation Treatment Department at the time given to you. If the door is locked, ring the doorbell on the wall to the right of the door and a member of the team will escort you to the brachytherapy area.

A nurse will ask you to get changed into a hospital gown. If support from the anaesthetic team is a suitable option for you the Anaesthetist will meet with you the morning of the procedure.

You will then be escorted into the brachytherapy treatment room. If required, anaesthetic support will occur before you are positioned for the procedure. If not, the Radiation Therapists will help you to lift your legs into the “boots”. The doctor will then use some local anaesthetic to numb the cervix before inserting the treatment applicators. The pictures below are some common applicators, your doctor will tell you exactly which applicator is best for your treatment.



The applicators consist of thin metal rods that pass through the cervix into the uterus. The cylinder part of the applicator is positioned in the vagina, if this is not used the rods will be held in place by gauze packing.

After the Applicators are inserted

If you have been put to sleep, after the insertion you will be woken up and transferred onto a hospital bed and taken back to the bed bay area.

A brachytherapy nurse will be with you all day to provide pain relief and make sure you are comfortable. You will need to lie flat or slightly elevated and keep your pelvis and legs still until the treatment is finished. There will be a catheter tube in your bladder so you won't need to get up to go to the toilet.

You will be taken for a CT scan in the Radiation Treatment Department.

You will be lying on a special mat called a “hover mat” to help transfer you onto the CT couch. This mattress can be inflated like an air-bed to allow the team to gently slide you from one bed to another. Just before the scan, the radiation therapists need to attach the thin tubes used for treatment to the ends of the applicators and do some measurements. You may feel someone gently touching the ends of the applicators but this is not painful. A nurse will then insert a small amount of fluid into your bladder through the catheter.

A CT scan will be taken of your pelvis and this scan is then used to plan your brachytherapy treatment. It may take several hours for your treatment plan to be created and checked. You may wish to bring a radio, or some music (and headphones) to listen to while you wait.