

## 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 Cervical/Uterine Brachytherapy

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 treatment involve?
- Possible side effects
- 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.

## After Treatment

Reactions usually peak about 1-2 weeks after treatment. Most people find these start to resolve 3-6 weeks after treatment. You will be given a follow up appointment to come back and see the doctor. You will also be provided with a vaginal dilator to use after treatment

## 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
- Psychologist
- Support groups
- Massage
- Fit for Life
- Chaplains
- Pacific Health
- Whanua Care

## **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.

## **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 3-5 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 will 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.

## Possible Side Effects

The side effects of this treatment are very similar to those you experienced during your external treatment. Please inform your treatment team if your side effects get worse or you get new ones.

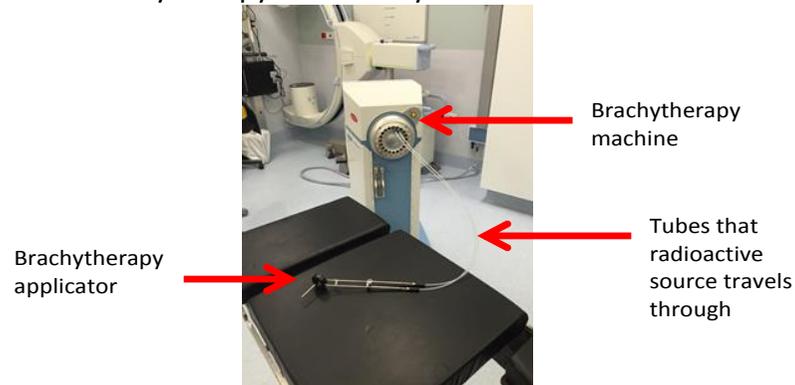
Side effects include:

- Urinary Symptoms
- Bowel Irritation
- Vaginal Irritation
- Fatigue

The booklet you have called '**Advice for Women Receiving Radiation Treatment to the Pelvis**' has more details about how you can care for yourself. Please ask for another one if you need it.

## 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 the 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 the hospital overnight. Your doctor will discuss this with you if necessary.

## What will my brachytherapy treatment involve?

Before starting your brachytherapy, you will:

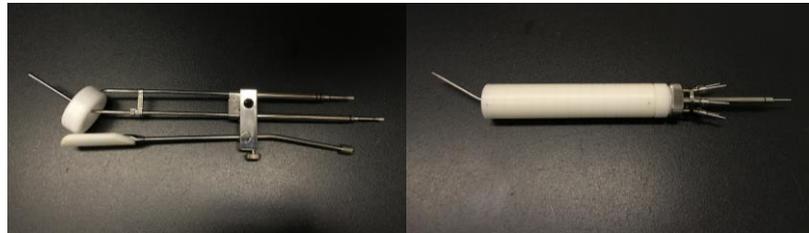
- Meet with your Radiation Therapist to discuss your brachytherapy appointments.
- Meet with your Radiation Oncologist to discuss your brachytherapy and sign consent.
- You *may* be taken for an MRI scan in the Radiology Department before your first treatment.
- The day before each treatment you will meet with a nurse to discuss preparation instructions for your brachytherapy. This includes a blood test as well as instructions about when to stop eating/drinking and how to prepare your bowels.
- Most people require an anaesthetic in order for the applicator to be placed. You may need to meet with the Anaesthetist in the days before your brachytherapy or this assessment may be done on the day of your procedure. Your treatment team will tell you more about this.

## 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. The Anaesthetist will meet with you to confirm that you are able to have an anaesthetic and explain the process.

You will then be escorted into the brachytherapy treatment room. Once you are asleep, the doctor will insert the treatment applicators. You will not feel anything as the applicators are placed. The pictures below are some common applicators, your doctor will tell you exactly which applicator is best for your individual treatment.



The thin metal tube on the applicator is passed through the cervix into the uterus. The other parts of the applicator are then positioned in the vagina and everything is held in place by gauze packing.

## After the Applicators are inserted

After the insertion is completed, you will be woken up and taken back to the bed bay.

As you wake up you will notice that you have a urinary catheter in your bladder and packing holding the applicators in place. 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 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 the toilet.

Once you have recovered from your anaesthetic 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 easily. 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. While you wait for the plan to be created, you may be taken for an MRI scan in the Radiology Department. 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.