Insertion of a peripherally inserted central catheter
Information for patients
What is a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)?

A PICC is a narrow, hollow tube called a catheter that is put into a vein in the arm, usually above the elbow. Ultrasound is used to identify the vein to be accessed. The tip of the catheter will lie in the large vein, just above your heart.

A PICC is usually recommended for patients who need certain types of medicines or treatments that can irritate or damage smaller veins; or who need injections over a long period of time.

The PICC can stay in place for up to a year, depending on your treatment.

The hollow centre of the PICC is called the lumen. Your catheter may have 1 or 2 lumens depending upon the treatment you require – allowing you to have more than one treatment at the same time. At the end of the tube outside the body, each lumen has a special cap, to which a drip line or syringe can be attached.

A specially trained nurse called a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) will insert the PICC at your bedside, after examining your arm veins to find the one most suitable for your PICC device.
Risks

You will need to give your written consent before we can insert the PICC. The CNS will discuss the risks and benefits of the procedure with you beforehand and also discuss with you any questions or concerns you may have.

The risks are all rare and include:

- bleeding
- Infection
- thrombosis (blood clot)
- phlebitis (inflammation of the vein)
- the line could go up into one of the veins in the neck.

What happens during the procedure?

The CNS uses ultrasound to decide which vein is the most suitable for the PICC. They will clean the area using antiseptic solution and then give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the skin. This usually stings a little.

The CNS will then insert the PICC. You will be asked to put your chin on your shoulder of the arm that the device is being inserted into. This is to prevent the PICC going up into one of the veins in the neck. You may feel a “pushing” sensation, but you should not feel any pain. The PICC will then be secured with a dressing.

The procedure should take 30-60 minutes.
After the procedure

You will be sent for an X-ray of your chest to make sure that the PICC is in the correct place before it is used.

There may be some bleeding from around the insertion site. This is quite normal. The nurse looking after you will apply further dressings if necessary.

To prevent any inflammation of the vein, heat should be applied (using a heat pad or warm water bottle) to the inner side of the upper arm every 6/8 hours for 20 minutes, during the first 72 hours after insertion.

Signs to look out for

If you notice during your treatment or after a dressing change that the length of tubing on the outside is increasing, please tell the nurse looking after you and ask that the Vascular Access CNS be contacted.

If you feel any pain, redness, swelling or change in sensation on the side the PICC has been placed you must tell your hospital nurse or doctor immediately.

The nurses on the ward will discuss further dressings with you, and who to contact if you have any queries or concerns. A contact number is also given on page 7.
Aftercare

The dressing on the line should be changed 24 hours after insertion and then weekly – or sooner if the dressing becomes loose, wet or blood stained. This can be done in the unit or ward, or a Community Practice nurse can be arranged to do this for you.

The line should be flushed after each use or weekly when not in use to prevent it from becoming blocked. This will be done at the dressing change.

Do not hesitate to remind any health care practitioner who handles the line to wash their hands, wear gloves and clean the bung thoroughly before and after use. This will help to prevent infections.

You are able to shower with your PICC line in situ but to prevent the dressing becoming wet, always use the bath guard provided or an alternative – e.g. clingfilm.

Please do not submerge your PICC line in water.

Activities

We discourage sports such as tennis, golf and vigorous gym exercise. Please not swim with your PICC line in situ.

Removing the PICC line

When your course of treatment has finished, the PICC will be removed by a healthcare professional. This is done by gently pulling the PICC out of your arm and should be pain free.
How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, or need any further information, please speak to the nurse looking after you or contact:

**Vascular Access Department**
Tel: 01865 221653 (Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm)

Further information

www.nice.org.uk – go to TA49 information for patients.
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk