Drainage of abdominal fluid (Paracentesis)
Information for patients
What is ascites?

Ascites is a medical term which simply means the accumulation of fluid within the abdomen. It is normal for there to be a small amount of fluid within the abdominal cavity, and this is being continuously created and absorbed. Ascites develops when the balance of production and removal is upset and the amount of fluid in the abdomen increases. There are a number of reasons for this imbalance. It occurs commonly in chronic liver disease.

What symptoms does it cause?

The presence of the excess fluid in the abdomen can cause a number of symptoms, including pain, poor appetite, shortness of breath, indigestion, nausea and vomiting, reduced mobility.

What can be done about it?

To relieve symptoms we need to remove the excessive fluid. This can be done by taking drugs called diuretics (commonly spironolactone). However, this is not always possible because of side-effects, the drugs stop working, or the drugs may take a few weeks to work. The quickest way to remove the fluid is to drain the fluid through a plastic tube inserted into the abdomen (this is called “Paracentesis”).

What does paracentesis involve?

We carry out Paracentesis on Ward 5F at the John Radcliffe Hospital. You will have been given a date to attend the ward for the paracentesis. Please arrive by 10am. You will be seen by a doctor on the ward who will ask you a few questions and be able to answer any further questions you may have.

For the procedure you will be lying on a bed. The doctor will examine you to decide the best position to insert the drain into
your abdomen. The doctor will give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area before inserting the drain (a plastic tube with a diameter of about 7mm). The drain will stay in for up to 6 hours before it is removed. A dressing will be placed over the area and should remain in place for 48 hours, and be kept as dry as possible. You will need to have a drip inserted in your arm to give you some fluid while the fluid is draining.

**What are the risks?**

Any procedure does carry a small risk of complications and side effects. Paracentesis is a safe procedure with a very small rate of significant side effects (less than 1 in 100 people).

The most common side effect is a feeling of tiredness after the procedure and some patients experience a slight increase in their abdominal pain.

Less common complications may include some leakage of fluid from the drain site for up to 72 hours after the procedure. This may require a single stitch, and you should contact Ward 5F if needed. Very occasionally patients get bleeding from the drain site, or patients may develop a low blood pressure. Very rare complications can include introduction of infection into the abdominal cavity or damage to one of the intra-abdominal organs (e.g. gut, liver, spleen).

**Do I have to stay in hospital overnight?**

For most patients this procedure will be performed as a day case. Once the drain has been removed and you are feeling well you will be able to go home. You should expect to stay in hospital for 8 hours in total.
Who do I contact if I have problems after the procedure?

If you have any questions or problems after the procedure please telephone:

Ward 5F:  **01865 221185** (24 hours).

You may be asked to attend the ward or may be advised to seek further advice and treatment from your GP practice.

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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**