Radiotherapy for a mesothelioma
Information for patients
Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have been recommended treatment with radiotherapy for a mesothelioma.

The General Radiotherapy Leaflet will explain what having the treatment involves, common side effects and some general information about the department. The leaflet – Radiotherapy for a mesothelioma will provide more detail, specific to the type of treatment planned for you and how you can help yourself during and following treatment.

It is intended as a guide because the timing and effects of treatment may vary from one person to another. This leaflet will highlight the key points of the discussions you will have had with your doctor and treatment team. Family members and friends may also find it helpful.

Treatment plan

The timing of the radiotherapy in your treatment may depend on your individual situation. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

Radiotherapy for a mesothelioma is given in two situations:

Sometimes painful lumps on the chest wall and skin can form around your operation scar or the site where you have had a chest drain. These can lead to the spread of the tumour along the tract of the scar. Radiotherapy, known as PORT site radiotherapy is given to limit the growth and spread of these cells. This usually involves three treatments (fractions) of radiotherapy given over the course of a week.

Radiotherapy can also be given to treat symptoms that are causing you problems. These include cough, chest pain, shortness of breath or when you are coughing up blood. This type of radiotherapy is called palliative treatment and you may
just have one treatment or up to 12 treatments daily Monday to Friday over two and a half weeks.

**Side effects**

Radiotherapy treatment is painless. However, there are some side effects which are associated with radiotherapy and you may notice one or more of them gradually developing over the course of treatment.

**Please note that it is rare for one patient to experience all of these side effects.**

If anything is worrying you, however small, during your treatment, please tell your therapy radiographer or radiotherapy nurse practitioner, either at your visit or by phoning the department.
Smoking while you are having treatment can cause your side effects to develop earlier, possibly be worse than usual and harder for you to cope with. We strongly advise you to try to give up smoking. We know this is often difficult and can help you contact services who can advise and support you – please talk to your therapy radiographer or lung cancer nurse practitioner.

**Tiredness**
You may feel tired especially toward the end of a course of treatment. Listen to your body and if necessary allow yourself extra time to rest or sleep. The tiredness wears off over a few weeks once the treatment ends.

**Skin reaction**
Most people develop a skin reaction in the area being treated, especially on the back. The area may become red, more dry, sensitive or begin to peel. Please refer to the General Radiotherapy Leaflet, which will tell you how to care for the skin in this area. It is usual for the skin reaction to begin two to three weeks after the beginning of a radiotherapy course. It will last for a small number of weeks after radiotherapy is complete. The redness and soreness will go away completely, but occasionally there may be some longer term skin changes that will be discussed with you if they are likely to be significant.

**Difficulty swallowing and indigestion**
This may happen if the radiotherapy includes your food pipe (oesophagus) in the area of treatment. This usually occurs after two to three weeks of treatment and begins to get better about three months after the treatment has finished.

Avoid hot or cold drinks – warm fluids might be more bearable. You might also need to make your food softer and more moist. A combination of pain killers and antacid medicines can help, normally prescribed by your doctor. Always take the medication regularly – before eating and drinking. Check with the treatment team before taking anything other than the drug prescribed.
If these problems prevent you eating, we can refer you to a dietician.

**Nausea (feeling sick)**
This may occur during your treatment. If we think this is likely then we will give you anti-sickness tablets to take before each treatment. It is important to continue to eat and drink, try eating small meals more frequently. If nausea persists or you are vomiting (being sick) despite taking anti-sickness medication then contact your doctor or radiotherapy specialist nurse.

**Cough**
You can develop a cough which maybe dry and tickly or you may cough up blood. This is normal. It may be relieved with sipping drinks. Some people find simple cough medicine helps. The irritation caused by the radiotherapy should settle within a few weeks of completing your treatment. If you develop a lasting cough contact your family doctor. If the sputum changes colour, becomes thicker or you have a temperature please tell the therapy radiographers treating you. It may be a sign of infection.

**Chest discomfort**
This can occur in the 24 hours following your treatment. It is more common in patients having one or two treatments. It should go away by itself or you may want to take a simple painkiller. Tell the therapy radiographer when you attend for treatment or call the department if it does not resolve.

**Temperature and shivering**
Patients, usually having one treatment, can experience shivering and begin to feel hot, within twenty four hours of having their radiotherapy. With a simple pain killer, like Paracetamol and rest this should disappear in the following 24 hours.

Usually the side effects you have experienced may become worse for a short while and slowly settle over a few weeks. Please do not worry as this is quite normal. During this time you should
continue to follow the advice you have been given during your treatment and take any prescribed medication for the side effects until they settle down.

**After treatment**

After your treatment has finished you will be asked to return to the Outpatients Clinic to be reviewed by your oncology consultant / team. Radiotherapy takes time to work and so it is at this appointment your doctor will assess and discuss your progress with you and what further appointments are needed in the future.
How to contact us

If you have any queries during your radiotherapy please do not hesitate to ask a radiotherapy radiographer treating you or the radiotherapy nurse practitioners on 01865 235472 during normal working hours or Oxford triage assessment team on 01865 572192 out of hours.

Following treatment you can contact

The lung cancer nurse practitioner team - 01865 226119 (Monday to Friday - calls received after three o’clock will be returned in the next working day) If urgent please contact main switchboard – 01865 841741 and ask for nurse practitioner to be bleeped.

Useful Website

The Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation – Research – Prevention – Support
www.roycastle.org
Helpline 0800 358 7200
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@ouh.nhs.uk

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Version 3, April 2012
Review, April 2015
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OMI 4523P