Superficial radiotherapy treatment

The following information will help you understand your radiotherapy treatment and how to minimise any side effects. Every person is an individual and can react differently to radiotherapy. If you have any concerns about your treatment, our radiographers, nurses and consultants are here to help and guide you.

What is superficial radiotherapy?
Superficial radiotherapy treatment is the use of low-energy X-rays to destroy unhealthy cells. This is very good for treating lesions on or just beneath the skin surface, as the X-rays don’t go deep into the body. This type of treatment is also suitable for treating other conditions such as keloid scars.

Radiation cannot be felt or seen and is entirely painless. Radiotherapy treatment is aimed at the affected area but will also involve some surrounding healthy tissue. However, cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation and will be destroyed, while normal cells are able to repair themselves.

What are the likely side effects?
After your treatment, the treated area may scab over (keratinise). If this happens a nurse may need to remove the scab before treatment. You may also get a discharge from beneath the scab. The cycle of the affected area healing and then scabbing over may be repeated several times during your treatment and for some time after your treatment is completed.

About your first visit
Your first visit will be your longest visit. This is because your consultant will need to mark up the treatment area. You will also be asked to complete a pre-treatment assessment form and sign a consent form before starting the treatment.

The clinical mark-up will involve having the treatment area on your skin marked with a non-permanent pen. The radiographer will record accurate measurements and may take photographs. This helps us to reproduce your treatment set-up every time you visit.

From this information the radiographers will calculate the correct radiotherapy dose and how long your treatment will take.

About your treatment
Your treatment will be planned specifically for you. The course may consist of one or more sessions. How long the actual treatment takes can also vary for each patient. The radiographer will make you comfortable before the treatment machine is moved into place. The end of the machine applicator will touch you, sometimes quite firmly, but it will not cause any pain.

During treatment
It is important that you keep very still during the treatment to allow the radiotherapy to be accurately targeted.
If the treatment takes longer than a few minutes, the radiographer may interrupt the session and come into the room to check that you are still comfortable. The radiographer can see you at all times via CCTV. If at any time you would like the radiographer in the room, raise your hand, keeping the rest of your body still.

The machine will make a beeping noise while it is working. When the treatment is finished, the radiographer will enter the room, move the machine away and remove any other treatment accessories.

It’s safe for you to wear a watch during treatment. However, please switch off all mobile phones as they can interfere with the machine. It is safe to use mobile phones in the radiotherapy reception area.

**Skin care**

While you are having treatment you will need to see the nurse weekly for advice on skin care. The skin in the treatment area may become dry, red and sore. To help reduce this, we recommend you follow these basic instructions:

- Wash the skin in the treatment area with lukewarm water and Simple soap.
- Have a shower rather than a bath.
- Don’t rub the skin - gently pat it dry.
- Only use creams or ointments in the treatment area that have been suggested by staff.
- Wear loose clothing made from natural fibres – this will allow the skin to breathe and avoid friction to the skin.
- Don’t use hot water bottles or heat pads near the treated area.

**General advice**

It’s very important that you protect the treated area from exposure to the sun (both during the treatment and for at least a year after your course has finished) as your skin will be more sensitive to UV rays.

Generally, your side-effects will get worse towards the end of the course of treatment. They may continue for seven to 10 days after the treatment is completed. After this, your skin will start to heal.

After your treatment and once the skin has healed, you may use sun block on the area as required.

**Support services**

Radiotherapy treatment at Bupa Cromwell Hospital also includes eight counselling sessions. These are available for all patients and relatives.

**Follow-up**

Your consultant will discuss follow-up appointments with you as you will require regular check-ups. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact us:

Radiotherapy reception +44 (0)20 7460 5626/7
Hospital switchboard +44 (0)20 7460 2000

If the Radiotherapy department is unavailable please contact the Oncology ward on +44 (0)20 7460 5992.