

Cancer Care Kenya

MP Shah Hospital, Shivachi Road, Parklands, Kenya.

Email:info@cancercarekenya.com

Patient information leaflets

A Patient's Guide to Radiotherapy at Cancer Care Kenya

Introduction

Your cancer specialist has recommended that your cancer is treated with a course of radiotherapy treatment at Cancer Care Kenya.

This leaflet has been written to give you more information and to answer some of your questions about the radiotherapy treatment you have been offered. Please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff if there is anything you are not sure about or if you need help. There are contact numbers at the end of this leaflet.

What is Radiotherapy treatment?

Radiotherapy is the treatment of cancer with measured doses of radiation. The treatment does not make you radioactive and you are quite safe to be with other people.

Radiotherapy can be given in different ways depending on your cancer. The treatment most often used is called external beam therapy and uses x-rays to treat. We have two external beam radiotherapy treatment units, which are called Linear accelerators (LA for short). Linear accelerators are high-energy x-ray machines.

How does radiotherapy work?

Radiotherapy aims to destroy all the cancer cells in the area being treated or helps to reduce any symptoms you may have from your cancer. Radiation has an effect on both normal and cancer cells; however it affects cancer cells more. Normal healthy cells can repair themselves more effectively and damage to them is usually temporary.

Where is the Radiotherapy department?

Cancer Care Kenya is situated on Shivachi Road, Parklands, at M.P.Shah Hospital.

Why can't I have my radiotherapy treatment at my local hospital?

Not every Hospital offers Radiotherapy.

IMPORTANT message for ladies

Radiotherapy will cause harm to an unborn child. Please tell us if you think you may be pregnant before we take any x-rays or give any treatment. It is **very important** you do not become pregnant before or during your treatment. Your radiotherapy doctor and radiographer will check the possibility of pregnancy before planning and giving your treatment.

Will Radiotherapy hurt?

No. Radiation cannot be seen or felt when the treatment is being given and is completely painless.

When is radiotherapy used?

Radiotherapy can be used in different ways to treat cancer. It can be used alone or with other treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy and hormone treatment. Your doctor will explain which of these applies to you.

Understanding your treatment

It is important that patients understand all about their treatment. The radiotherapy doctor and radiographers will provide each patient with the information they need. This information will include the benefits of the treatment and any risks involved. To help you think about any questions you may wish to ask we have provided a list of questions you may find useful

What are the benefits of the treatment you are advising me to have? Your radiotherapy doctor will be able to discuss these with you.

What are the risks of this treatment? Your radiotherapy doctor will discuss all the risks of having radiotherapy treatment with you.

Could I have any other treatments?

What will treatment be like and how long will it take?

How will I feel during and after my treatment?

Are there any side effects and what can I do about them?

What are the costs to my treatment? Your radiotherapy doctor will be able to discuss this with you.

What are the benefits of radiotherapy?

The aim of this treatment is to kill off all the cancer cells.

What would happen if I decided to have no treatment?

Your doctor will be able to discuss what might happen if you decide not to have radiotherapy treatment. They will also be able to discuss any other treatment choices you might consider.

What about my medicines?

Please tell the radiographers about any tablets or medicines you take and remember to bring all your medicines with you on your first visit. We will be able to tell you if you need to change how you take your medicine.

How is my treatment planned?

Before treatment can be given it is important to locate the exact area to be treated. Each course of treatment is designed to suit the needs of each patient. You may find it easier to wear trousers or skirt and top for your planning appointment and treatment.

Planning can be done in different ways.

The doctor may examine you in clinic and put marks on your skin with a felt pen. Measurements are taken and your treatment is planned using this information.

If we are treating your head or neck we may make a special mask to help us plan your treatment. We can put marks onto the mask and do not need to mark your skin. A leaflet is available to give you more information about this.

You may have a CT scan using a CT scanner, (this is a special x-ray machine) to give us the information we need.

We use colored pens to mark your skin. This helps us to see where to place your treatment. However these pen marks will come off with washing and we will ask you if we can use tiny permanent marks using special dye (these are tattoos the size of dots).

How long will my planning appointment last?

This is usually the longest appointment and can take an hour or even longer.

Some patients may have to make more than one planning visit. We will let you know if this is the case.

What happens next?

The information we have collected is used to complete your treatment plan.

This takes time so your treatment may not start the same day as your planning appointment. You will usually be given an appointment for your treatment to start during your planning visit.

How often do I need to come for treatment?

Your treatment is individual and designed for you. Your radiotherapy doctor will discuss with you the total number of treatments that you need and how often you will need to attend the department.

Most patients are treated once on each day of the week (Monday to Friday). Some patients may need to be treated twice in one day. We will tell you if this is the case.

Some patients may have a rest day when our treatment machines are serviced. We will let you know if this is the case.

Can I choose my appointment time?

The treatment units treat lots of patients during the day. We cannot always promise you the exact time you request but we will try to provide a time that suits you. Please give us plenty of warning if you have a specific time request.

How long is each treatment?

Treatment may take anything from five to fifteen minutes and this depends on your individual plan. Your radiographer will be able to tell you how long each session will take when you come for your first appointment.

What happens when I have radiotherapy treatment?

When you arrive for your treatment please check in at the reception desk. They will let the radiographers know you have arrived.

The radiographers will collect you from the waiting area and take you to the treatment room when it is your treatment time. Your treatment is given with you in the same position as when your treatment was planned. You will be asked to lie on the treatment couch. The couch is then raised so it is closer to the machine. The radiographers use laser lights to line up your tattoos. The treatment machine comes close to you but does not touch you.

Once you are in the correct position the radiographers leave the room to switch on the x-rays. You will be asked to lie still while the machine is on. You may breathe normally during treatment.

During your treatment you will be alone in the room. However, the radiographers will watch you on close circuit television and you can speak to them through an intercom if you wish. They can stop the treatment at any time if you need them to.

You will not feel the x-rays but you will know the machine is switched on as it makes a buzzing noise.

When the machine stops the radiographers will come back into the room. Depending on your treatment the radiographers may move the machine into a different position and then go out to switch on again.

It takes about 10minutes each day to have your radiotherapy and unless you are seeing your doctor you may leave straight afterward.

Reactions to radiotherapy

There are nearly always side effects to any treatment. Radiotherapy destroys cancer cells but can also temporarily affect healthy cells in the area of your body being treated. This is why radiotherapy causes side effects.

Your radiotherapy doctor and radiographers will give you more information about side effects and how to cope with them.

General side effects

Tiredness and fatigue

You may feel more tired than usual during your treatment. This is more likely to be near the end of treatment and may last for a couple of months after treatment has finished. Try to rest when you can and pace yourself during treatment. Sometimes a small amount of gentle exercise can help. Ask family and friends to help if you can.

Skin reactions

How your skin reacts to the treatment depends on your own skin type and the area treated. Some people have no skin reactions at all. Common reactions you may see are reddening and/or darkening and dryness in the area treated. The radiographers look out for these reactions and will give you advice on how to cope with any skin changes. You may find it helps to follow these instructions when washing;

- Gently wash the area in warm water

- Do not use soap

- Pat the skin dry with a soft towel

- Expose the treated area to the air when you can

- Avoid rubbing the skin

Do not shave or use any hair removal creams in the treatment area

Do not apply heat to the treatment area and protect the skin from the sun

Use aqueous cream (you can use this before treatment starts)

Please let your radiographer know if you feel any soreness

You should not use any other creams, ointments, lotions or deodorants in the treatment area unless these are prescribed by your radiotherapy doctor or given to you by a radiographer. Any skin area not treated should be washed as normal.

Two to four weeks after radiotherapy, skin reddening and/or darkening usually subsides after which you can go back to normal washing. If you have any other questions about skin care, please ask your radiographer.

Changes to your blood counts

Radiotherapy affects the cells in your bone marrow which make blood cells. This is more likely if you are having a large area treated or having treatment to the bones of the leg, chest or pelvis. We may check your blood levels more regularly if this is likely to happen.

If your white blood cell or platelet count falls very low, you may need to rest from treatment so your blood count can return to normal.

If the level of red blood cells is low (this is called anemia) you may feel tired and need to be given blood to boost your red cell count. This is called a blood transfusion.

Eating and drinking

Some people find that radiotherapy treatment may change their sense of taste and that they lose their appetite during treatment. Your radiotherapy doctor and radiographer will be able to tell you about any problems you may have and how to cope with them.

You may find it helps to;

Eat small snacks, little and often, instead of big meals.

If swallowing is difficult, have a soft or liquid diet.

Use food supplements if you are not eating properly.

Specific side effects

Specific side effects depend on the area of the body being treated. Side effects of your treatment will be discussed with you. Written and verbal information on how to cope with these side effects will also be given to you.

Late effects of radiotherapy

Some of the effects of the radiotherapy are not seen until months or years after the treatment is finished. This is true for other treatments like chemotherapy and surgery too.

Specific long-term risks from radiotherapy treatment will be discussed with you. It is important to look at the benefit of having your treatment alongside the risk of late effects. If you have any concerns then please ask for more information.

Can I bring somebody with me?

Yes, some patients find this helpful.

Can I have a drink while I am waiting?

Yes you can eat and drink. If there are any reasons you may not eat or drink this will be explained to you.

Do I have to stay in hospital?

Most patients travel daily from home for treatment.

Can I carry on working?

You may carry on working if you wish to, as long as your radiotherapy doctor agrees. Please ask if you need advice.

What will happen after my treatment has finished?

The side effects of the treatment will start to ease off usually within two to four weeks of the treatment finishing. The full benefit of the treatment is not usually reached until some weeks after the last treatment session. An information leaflet is available to help.

If you have any worries or concerns you can contact us at any time. Our contact number is listed below and can be found on your appointment card.

Your radiotherapy doctor may arrange to see you once the treatment has ended. This is called a follow up appointment.

How will I feel when my radiotherapy comes to an end?

Many patients find radiotherapy treatment demanding. When treatment has finished you may look forward to returning to your usual lifestyle and only having to visit the hospital for follow up checks. Patients sometimes find this time to be sad or anxious as there are fewer links with staff and other patients.

Can I sunbathe?

Many patients plan a holiday for the end of their treatment. Treated skin may catch the sun faster than it did before your treatment and get sore.

Don't forget the sun can be strong in winter too!

For the first year following your treatment in sunny weather you should use a sunblock (factor 25 and above) or cover up with light clothing.

Can I go swimming?

If your skin does not feel sore you can go swimming. Remember to shower and moisturize your skin afterwards because salt or chlorine water will dry your skin.

If I have any worries what should I do?

When treatment has ended you can contact your radiographers for advice if you have any questions or worries about your treatment or recovery. You should contact your doctor if you get any long term side effects.

Other useful information

Your treatment will be supervised by a radiotherapy doctor (also called an oncologist). Your treatment is planned and given by therapy radiographers who work closely with your radiotherapy doctor. You may also meet our physicists, nurses, clinical exercise physiologist, support staff, and reception staff. All staff wears identification to tell you who they are.

You may also meet volunteers and therapists from Faraja Cancer Support. A leaflet with information is available on request.

Contact telephone numbers

+254 – 20- 3740132

+254 – 20 – 3740153

+254 – 20- 3740227