Kent Oncology Centre
Orthovoltage Radiotherapy Treatment and Planning
Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand your orthovoltage radiotherapy planning and treatment. Please feel free to discuss any concerns you may have with the treatment staff or contact the Macmillan team on the telephone numbers below:

Maidstone Hospital
Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists ☏ 01622 225094
Appointment enquiries ☏ 01622 225080

Kent & Canterbury Hospital
Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists ☏ 01227 766877
Ext 74098
Appointment enquiries ☏ 01227 783010

Kent Oncology website www.kentoncology.nhs.uk

What is orthovoltage radiotherapy?

Orthovoltage radiotherapy is treatment with x-rays. Orthovoltage refers to the energy range of the x-rays used. These x-rays are strong enough to kill cancer cells but do not penetrate more than a few centimetres beyond the surface of the skin.

Orthovoltage radiotherapy works well for skin cancers. It is particularly useful in areas where surgery might be difficult or disfiguring, such as the face, and for tumours that have penetrated deeply into the skin.
The treatment is given as an outpatient in the radiotherapy department. Often only a single treatment is needed, but sometimes several doses of treatment are necessary and these are given over a period of one or more weeks. Your doctor will discuss your individual treatment plan with you. Each treatment is called a ‘fraction’. Giving the treatment in fractions ensures that normal cells are damaged less than cancer cells.

You will be given a list of all your appointments. If possible, we will try to give you a similar time for each visit but occasionally there may be alterations.

**Giving your consent**

Before you have radiotherapy your doctor will explain the aims of the treatment to you. You will be asked to sign a form saying that you give your permission (consent) for the hospital staff to give you the treatment; no medical treatment can be given without your consent. Before you are asked to sign the form you should have been given full information about:

- the type and extent of the treatment you are advised to have
- the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment
- any other treatments that may be available
- any significant risks or side effects of the treatment

Patients often feel that the hospital staff are too busy to answer their questions, but it’s important for you to be aware of how the treatment is likely to affect you. The staff will make time for you to ask questions.

If there is anything you don’t understand let the staff know straight away so that they can explain.

It can be helpful to have a friend or relative with you when the treatment is explained, to help you remember the discussion more fully. You may also find it useful to write down a list of questions before you attend any appointments. You do not have
to make a decision when the treatment is first explained, you can always ask for more time to think it through.

You are free to choose **not** to have the treatment, and the staff can explain what may happen as a result of that. It's important to tell a doctor or the nurse in charge of this decision so that they can record it in your medical notes. You don’t have to give a reason for not wanting to have treatment, but it can help staff if they know so that they can offer the best advice.

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<th>Pregnant?</th>
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<td>Please tell the medical staff if you might be pregnant; radiotherapy can harm the developing baby.</td>
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**Planning your treatment**

Careful planning ensures that the treatment is as effective as possible and that the radiotherapy rays are aimed precisely at the cancer, causing the least possible damage to the surrounding healthy tissues.

**Positioning**

During the treatment planning session you will be lying on a fairly hard couch, identical to the one that you will lie on during treatment. The radiographers will make you as comfortable as possible. The oncologist will decide the area to be treated and draw some ink marks on your skin. We need you to lie very still for a few minutes so that photographs and accurate measurements can be taken and your exact position recorded. The radiographers can then make sure that you are lying in the correct position each time you have treatment.

Ink marks can be removed before you go home. Occasionally permanent skin marks, the size of a pinpoint, may be necessary but this will be discussed with you before hand. Some patients’ treatment may need to be discussed with other staff, e.g. physicists or technicians.
**Treatment masks**
Although not always required you may need to have a special mask made, designed to protect sensitive organs near the treatment area and also to guide the treatment very accurately. A personal mask is made by taking an impression of the treatment area with a soft modeling compound. The procedure is painless and usually takes about half an hour. If you have been told you will need a mask please do not wear any hair products, e.g. hairspray, gel or wax on the day of planning; these can make hair stick to the mask during moulding.

The mask will be made and ready to wear before your next visit. It will fit snugly but you will be able to breathe normally and you will only need to wear it for a short while on each visit. If the treatment is near your eye the mask may cover one or both to protect them during treatment.

**Internal eye shields**
If the treatment area is directly next to your eye it may be necessary to place a temporary internal eye shield in the eye to protect it during treatment. Anaesthetic drops will be given to prevent discomfort. After treatment a pad will be placed over the eye and should be worn for at least two hours to avoid damage to the eye. During this time you will be unable to drive.

**Having your treatment**
Before your first treatment the radiographers will explain to you what you will see and hear. It’s quite normal to feel anxious about having your treatment, but as you get to know the staff and understand what is going on it should become easier. Don’t be afraid to talk about any fears or worries to the staff; they are there to help you, and the more you understand about your treatment the more relaxed you will be.

Radiotherapy itself is painless and each session may take anything from a few seconds to several minutes.
Your positioning is very important, so the radiographers may take a little while to get you ready (they may call this 'setting up') and to adjust the height and position of the table. The radiographer will move the x-ray machine close to you and the end of an applicator will lightly touch you in the treatment area.

Other pieces of equipment may be needed to keep you completely still, ensuring the treatment is given accurately. As soon as you are positioned correctly the staff will need to leave the room to prevent them from being exposed to any unnecessary radiation. Radiotherapy units treat many people and the staff need to keep appointments running on time, so they usually leave the room promptly as soon as you are positioned, keeping your treatment time as short as possible.

During treatment you will be alone for a few minutes but there will be a radiographer watching you during this time on a monitor camera. To protect your privacy, nobody else will be able to see you. If you have any problems you can raise your hand to attract the radiographer’s attention and they will come in to help you. The radiographers may come into the treatment room to check your position in the middle of your treatment.

**Side effects**

This treatment affects only a small area of skin and will not make you feel unwell. For a week or two after treatment, the treated skin will be red and inflamed, looking as though the treatment has made things worse rather than better. This is normal.

After a few weeks the area will dry up and form a crust or scab. Over another week or so, the scab will peel away leaving healed skin underneath. At first, this new skin will look pinker than the skin around it. This will gradually fade, and the treated area will come to look like the skin around it, though maybe slightly paler.

Radiotherapy to areas that produce hair, such as the head, can make the hair fall out in the treated area. Your hair may grow back within six to twelve months, depending on the dose of
radiotherapy and the length of treatment you’ve had. However, for some people their hair loss is permanent. The Oncology team can discuss with you whether your hair is likely to grow back once the treatment has ended.

Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive and it is perfectly safe for you to be around other people, including children, after each treatment session.

**Skin care**

Once treatment has started please take care when washing the area. Allow warm water to run over it and gently pat or air dry as rubbing will cause more soreness. The staff will advise you what creams, if any, you can use on the treatment area.

Men are advised not to shave if the treatment area is within the beard. Lesions in the hair or hair line should be covered when hair washing, but no adhesive (stick on) dressings should be used in the treatment area; use a mild shampoo and warm water. Avoid direct heat such as hair dryers. Do not apply any chemicals like perm lotion, gel, hair spray and dyes during the treatment time and for four to six weeks afterwards.

Healing is usually better if the skin is left open to the air but, depending on where the area is, you may prefer to cover it. Please ask for advice on what type of dressings should be used.

By the time you see the doctor for a follow-up appointment eight weeks after treatment your side effects should have resolved.

If you have any questions about cancer or your treatment, or you need some support or financial help, please ask to speak to one of the Macmillan Specialist Radiographers or contact the Macmillan Information Centre at Maidstone (see back page).
Further information and advice

Kent Oncology Macmillan Cancer Information Centre, Maidstone Hospital
Offers face to face support and information to anyone who has concerns about cancer (patients, relatives, friends or carers).
Telephone: 📞 01622 227064
Email: mtw-tr.cancerinformation@nhs.net

Kent and Medway Cancer Network
www.kentmedwaycancerguide.nhs.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support
Provide practical, medical and financial support and push for better cancer care. Offers an interpreting service.
Telephone: 📞 0808 808 0000
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Choices for cancer information prescriptions
Website: www.nhs.uk/ipg

Cancer Research
This charity provides information about cancer, treatment and clinical trials.
Telephone: 📞 0808 800 4040
Website: www.cancerhelp.org.uk

NHS Direct
NHS Direct online

Counsellors in the following hospitals:
Kent and Canterbury 📞 01227 864045
Maidstone 📞 01622 224982
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother 📞 01843 225544
William Harvey 📞 01233 633331
Patient Experience Teams (PALS) for East Kent patients:

Kent and Canterbury Hospital
Desk at the outpatient’s entrance of the hospital
Phone: ☎ 01227 783145
e-mail: patientexperience@ekht.nhs.uk

Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital
Office at the main entrance of the hospital (Ramsgate Road)
Phone: ☎ 01843 234234
e-mail: patientexperience@ekht.nhs.uk

William Harvey Hospital
Desk at the main entrance of the hospital
Phone: ☎ 01233 616615
e-mail: patientexperience@ekht.nhs.uk

Kent Oncology Centre Online
www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Macmillan Cancer Support.

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the PALS Team. We will do our best to arrange this.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
If you would like to raise any concerns, make comments and suggestions or require information on Trust services, you can contact PALS. Office opening times are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 4.00pm. Both offices offer a 24 hour answering machine. Messages will be responded to within one working day, so please do leave a contact number.

PALS Maidstone Hospital ☎ 01622 224960
PALS Tunbridge Wells ☎ 01892 632953
PALS Email mtwpals@nhs.net
PALS SMS ☎ 07747 782317
PALS Maidstone Fax ☎ 01622 224843
PALS Tunbridge Wells Fax ☎ 01892 632954

Issue date: May 2011
Review date: May 2013
Database reference: CAN/RAD/35
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