Examination under anaesthetic and cystoscopy: staging cancer of the cervix

This leaflet is for women who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer and now need an examination under anaesthetic (EUA) and cystoscopy. The leaflet should answer any questions you have about what an EUA and cystoscopy is, what happens during this procedure and why your doctor has recommended this for you.

Why do I need an EUA and cystoscopy?
When a cancer has been found, it is important to know what areas of the body are affected; this is called staging. Staging is important as it helps the doctors decide which treatments are likely to be most effective for you.

We know when a cervical cancer starts to spread it is most likely to affect the parts of the body close to where the cancer has started. So for cancer of the cervix, it is important to check the bladder, bowel, vagina and the womb for any signs of cancer. The best way of doing this is to perform a physical examination while you are under anaesthetic (asleep).

If you have not already had a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, you will also be scheduled to have this, so that your doctors can look at pictures of the inside of your body. This will help to support their assessment of your cancer by EUA and cystoscopy. Please see the leaflet Having an MRI scan.

What is a cystoscopy?
A cystoscopy is when a fine tube with a light and a camera (cystoscope) is inserted into the tube (urethra) which drains urine from the bladder away from the body. Once the camera is in place, your bladder will be filled with liquid or gas. This gives your doctor a better view of the bladder lining making it easier to spot anything unusual. If anything unusual is seen, your doctor may take biopsies (samples) to send to the laboratory, your doctor will discuss this with you before the procedure.

Sometimes, the doctor may also wish to look inside the womb during the EUA, using an instrument similar to the cystoscope, called a hysteroscope. If this is necessary, your doctor will discuss this with you and you can find more information in the Having a hysteroscopy leaflet.
What will happen before the procedure?
You will be asked to remove all your clothing and change into a hospital theatre gown. Please bring your own pair of slippers and a dressing gown with you to wear over the theatre gown if you wish.

A nurse will ask you some questions about your medical history, and will then take your blood pressure to make sure you are properly prepared for your treatment.

As you will need an anaesthetic, you will see an anaesthetist before the procedure who will decide if you are fit enough for this. See the Having an anaesthetic leaflet. A cannula (thin plastic tube) will be put into a vein in your arm, often in the back of the hand. The anaesthetic drugs will be injected through the cannula and you will quickly drift off to sleep.

What will happen during the procedure?
While you are asleep your doctor will use a speculum (the instrument used to do a cervical screen/smear test) to see your cervix clearly.

They will then examine your cervix with a finger for any abnormalities to help the doctor decide where the cancer is and how big it is. The doctor will wear sterile gloves for this. The doctor will also feel for any abnormalities behind the cervix by inserting a finger into your rectum (back passage). You may also receive an antibiotic to decrease the risk of urinary infection.

What will happen after the procedure?
The examination usually takes 20 to 30 minutes. When the doctor has finished the examination, the camera is gently removed. You will be taken to the recovery unit, where you will stay until you wake up from the anaesthetic. You may have an urge to pass urine when you come round from the anaesthetic, but you may find this difficult as your bladder will be emptied at the end of the procedure.

Before you leave hospital your doctor will prescribe painkillers if you need them.

When will I get the results?
You should be provided with a follow-up appointment, usually for within two weeks of your procedure to discuss the findings and your cancer treatment plan. If you do not receive an appointment within a week of your procedure you should contact your clinical nurse specialist.

What are the risks?
Most types of surgery have some risks. These risks can increase when the person also has a general anaesthetic. It is important to remember however, that most people will have an examination under anaesthetic without any problems. The most common risks are:

- **Bruising and swelling** – you may have some bruising and swelling around the urethra from the cystoscope being inserted. This should clear up after a few days. If it does not, please contact us or your GP – you may temporarily need a catheter (narrow tube) placed in your bladder to help drain the urine until the bruising and swelling goes down.

- **Damage to the bladder** – it is possible to damage the bladder with the cystoscope or when taking a biopsy. This can lead to bleeding and infection, which may need treatment with medicines or surgery.
• **Bleeding when you pass urine** – you may have a small amount of bleeding from the cystoscope being passed up the urethra, or from any biopsies taken. Some patients do not have any bleeding at all, but some find their urine is slightly pink for a few days after this procedure. Drinking plenty of water (about three litres spaced out over 24 hours) can help to clear your urine. If your urine remains pink after a few days, contact your GP.

• **Bleeding from the vagina** – please do not use internal contraceptives or tampons. Instead you may use a sanitary towel after the procedures. You might notice some small blood spots on your sanitary pad/panty liner for a few days after the procedure. This is quite normal. If you have had a biopsy taken you may find this bleeding does not stop after a few days or becomes heavier. If this happens please contact your doctor, as sometimes an infection can cause prolonged bleeding and antibiotics may help. For a small number of women the bleeding may be related to the cancer.

• **Infection** – If you notice any symptoms of infection such as redness, swelling, heat around the area, discomfort on passing urine, a new vaginal discharge which smells strongly and/or is green/yellow please inform your doctor as you may need antibiotics. There is also a risk that you will develop a urine infection after your cystoscopy, which could result in a fever and pain when you urinate. Drinking plenty of water after the procedure can reduce the likelihood of this. Occasionally, a chest infection may develop as a result of having a general anaesthetic. You should also let your doctor know if you develop a productive cough (cough up yellow/green coloured spit);

If you have any questions about any of the risks discussed here, please feel free to talk to a member of your hospital team who will be happy to help.

**Going home**

You must have someone to escort you home and stay with you for 24 hours after the procedure. They should come with you for the appointment or be contactable by phone when you are ready to leave. If you do not have an escort, or have not arranged to be collected by someone, your procedure will have to be cancelled. If you cannot arrange this, then please call us on t: 020 7188 1729 and speak to one of the pre-assessment nurses so we can help to make alternative arrangements.

Having someone at home to care for you will give you time to recover from the anaesthetic and also help you in case you find any problems after the procedure.

You might feel light-headed and tired when you go home after the examination. Please rest for the remainder of the day and the following day to help you recover from the general anaesthetic. The anaesthetic will take 24 to 48 hours to fully wear off, although, you do not need to stay in bed for this time. Gently moving around your home will help.

You may feel a stinging sensation or have difficulty passing urine for the first day or two. Please drink extra fluid for the first 24 hours after the procedure to help improve this. If the pain is severe and lasts for more than couple of days, please contact your GP.

**Will I need any dressings?**

You may need to wear sanitary pads or panty liners for a couple of days to protect your clothing from the small amount of bleeding you may have.

**Medication**

You may be prescribed antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection, however this is not done routinely. If you are prescribed antibiotics it is important you complete the whole course.
Please do not drink alcohol until you have finished the antibiotics and your symptoms have completely cleared. To reduce the risk of infection, please do not have sexual intercourse until any swelling or bleeding has cleared.

What shall I do if I have a problem or concern?
If you have any concerns, please contact or visit your GP, call the gynaecology ward, NHS 111, or go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) or call 999 in the event of an emergency.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Day Surgery Unit (DSU) if you still have the following symptoms a couple of days after the operation:
- extreme pain
- continuous or excessive bleeding
- passing blood clots
- a raised temperature – 38°C (100.4F) or greater
- excessive swelling, or
- difficulty passing urine.

The DSU is open Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm t: 020 7188 1734

Further sources of information
Your clinical nurse specialist can provide you with additional support and information about your cancer, investigations and treatments. They can also provide emotional support during this challenging time and practical advice on concerns you may have, with finances or benefits, recovering from procedures or symptoms for example (contact details at the end of this leaflet).

Benefits Enquiry Line w: www.dwp.gov.uk
Cancer Research UK t: 0808 800 4040  w: www.cancerresearchuk.org
Jo’s Trust – for those affected by cervical cancer w: www.jotrust.co.uk
Macmillan Cancer Support t: 0808 808 0000 (freephone) w: www.macmillan.org.uk
Gynaecological Cancer Support Group – meets on the first Friday of each month from 11.30am to 1pm at the Dimbleby Cancer Care Centre t: 020 7188 5918
**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the clinical nurse specialist or other member of staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Your comments and concerns**
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)  
**e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  
**e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

**Language and accessible support services**
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

**t:** 020 7188 8815  
**e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

**NHS 111**
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.  
**t:** 111

**NHS Choices**
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** www.nhs.uk

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**Contact us**
Clinical nurse specialist  
**t:** 020 7188 2707 (Please leave a message, your call will be returned within 24 working hours) Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Dimbleby Cancer Care  
**t:** 020 7188 5918  
**e:** richarddimblebycentre@gstt.nhs.uk

Gynaecology Ward  
**t:** 020 7188 2703 or  
**t:** 020 7188 2697

Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets. For information leaflets on other conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

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**Dimbleby Cancer Care** provides cancer support services for Guy’s and St Thomas’.
We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy’s.  
**t:** 020 7188 5918  
**e:** DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk