Guy’s, King’s and St Thomas’ cancer services

Palliative lung radiotherapy

This information booklet is about radiotherapy for lung cancer.

If you have any questions, or would like more advice, please ask a member of your treatment team. The team consists of radiographers, doctors and nurses who will help and support you throughout your treatment.

There are specialist Lung Cancer Nurses who are available for advice and support. They can also put you in touch with your local hospital Lung Cancer Nurse. If you would like to contact them please call:

- Rachel Thomas t: 020 7188 4758
- Paula Tindale-Paul t: 020 7188 4758
- Sarah Compton t: 0207 188 4758
- Marrika Colvin t: 020 7188 4758

The contact numbers for the Radiotherapy Departments are on page 5 of this booklet.

If you have a problem in the evening or weekend, please contact the main switchboard on: t: 020 7188 7188 and ask for ‘operator’ or press 0. Then ask the operator for the oncology registrar on call.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses radiation (high energy x-rays or similar rays) to treat cancer. It damages your body’s cells within the treatment area, killing the cancer cells but allowing your normal cells to recover. Its side-effects are usually only in the area you are having treated.

Planning your treatment

Before your planning appointment you will have been asked to sign a consent form. This is to confirm that you agree to have radiotherapy treatment. If you have any further questions please ask the radiographers at your first treatment appointment, when they ask you to verbally confirm your consent to have radiotherapy.

To plan your treatment you will need to have a CT scan of your chest which will take about 15 minutes.
You will need to remove your clothing from the waist upwards and then lie on a treatment couch, usually flat on your back with your arms by your sides. The radiographers will move you into position. The CT scanner will take an x-ray of the treatment area while the couch passes slowly through the scanner and back again. It will not touch you and you will not feel anything. During the procedure it is important that you keep as still as possible and breathe normally.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will watch you all the time on closed circuit television. If you need anything, raise your arm and the radiographers can return to the room.

The radiographers will put some pen marks on your skin which can be washed off after this visit. They will then make one or two small permanent marks on your skin (a tattoo) using ink and a needle. These marks help the radiographers move you into exactly the right position for each treatment.

Before you leave the department we will give you information about your treatment schedule.

**Treatment**

The amount of radiation needed for your treatment is divided into small daily doses.

Treatment is daily from Monday to Friday, unless you are told otherwise. You will be in the treatment room for approximately 15 minutes.

When you arrive for your first appointment please report to the reception desk, where you will be directed to the treatment area.

A radiographer will explain your treatment and answer any questions that you may have.

**St Thomas’**
Clinical Oncology, Lower Ground Floor, Lambeth Wing for Elekta 1 and 4.
**OR**
South Wing Radiotherapy Suite, Ground Floor, South Wing for Elekta 2 and 3.

**Guy’s**
Radiotherapy, Lower Ground Floor, Borough Wing for Elekta 5 and 6

**During treatment**

You will need to remove your clothing from the waist upwards so that the radiographers can see the permanent marks on your skin. The radiographers will help you lie on the treatment couch in the same position as when you had your CT scan. They will move the treatment machine into position. It will come very close to you but will not touch you. They will then leave the room to switch the machine on. It is important that you keep as still as possible throughout your treatment and continue to breathe normally.

You will be alone in the room during your treatment, but the radiographers will be watching you all the time on closed circuit television. If you require assistance raise your arm and the radiographers will return to the room. There may be some music playing in the background and you will hear some noises from the machine but you will not feel anything.
**Treatment review**

If you have a specific problem during your treatment, tell the radiographers. If necessary, they will arrange for you to be seen by a doctor.

**Side effects during radiotherapy**

Not everyone will experience all the side effects that we mention in this guide. Do not feel that the radiotherapy is not working if you do not experience all the side effects, as people react individually.

**Skin reaction**

It is common to have a skin reaction from radiotherapy. Any reaction will not happen immediately, it can develop over several treatments. Skin in the treatment area may become dry, red and itchy.

To reduce the possible reaction we recommend that you use Doublebase® Gel twice a day in the treatment area to soothe and moisturise your skin. Please read the Doublebase® Gel fact sheet for more information. This is contained in your information pack given to you at your planning appointment.

**Eating difficulties**

You may have problems eating due to loss of appetite or because you are feeling unwell. You may also find eating difficult, as your food pipe (oesophagus) might become sore if it is within the treatment area. Speak to the radiographers who will give you advice or can refer you to a dietician.

Try to drink at least six to eight glasses of fluid a day.

**Tiredness**

This treatment may make you feel tired. Several things can cause this:

- Your body needs to repair itself, which uses energy;
- You may be having or have had chemotherapy, which can also make you feel very tired;
- Travelling to and from the hospital for appointments;
- The change in daily routines.

This does not mean that you have to put your normal life on hold. Give yourself time to relax. Do not fight the tiredness. Macmillan produces a booklet called *Coping with Fatigue*. It can be ordered free of charge – contact details are on page 5 of this booklet.

**Other symptoms**

You may find that your symptoms such as a productive cough and breathlessness get slightly worse during your treatment. These symptoms will gradually settle down after your treatment ends.
**General advice**

**Washing**

If possible shower instead of bathing. Use lukewarm water and do not stay in the shower for too long. Do not use shower gel, bath oils or bubble bath. Baby soap may be used to wash the treatment area. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel, do not rub.

**Swimming and saunas**

Do not use a pool or sauna during your treatment. They can dry your skin, which can cause a skin reaction. You should avoid these activities until your skin reaction settles.

**After treatment**

Radiotherapy side-effects reach a peak about seven to ten days after your treatment is finished. During this period any side-effects you have experienced may continue to get worse or if you had no side-effects some may develop. The majority of these side-effects will settle down about one month after treatment. If you have any questions please ask the radiographers or your doctor.

About one month after your treatment ends, you will need to return to the clinic where you were originally seen. Please make sure on your last day of radiotherapy that this appointment has been booked. The radiographers can help you to arrange this.

**Coping with lung cancer**

The people taking care of you understand that being diagnosed with cancer is very stressful, and the treatment for it may increase your concerns. After a diagnosis of lung cancer, you may have specific worries.

*These might include:*

- coping with personal relationships
- talking about your diagnosis
- continuing with social and work activities.

Many people feel unable to cope with what is happening to them and feel anxious or depressed. It can be helpful to know that most people find these feelings ease with time.

Discuss your concerns with any of the staff that are involved in your treatment, as well as your family and friends. This is important as it may help you to find answers to the questions that you may be asking yourself.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is available if you need additional support. The service provides information, psychological support, welfare benefits advice and complementary therapy.

**For more information:**

**t:** 020 7188 5918
Support groups
There are monthly lung cancer support groups for patients and their carers at St Thomas’ and King’s hospitals. For more information please contact your lung cancer clinical nurse specialist (CNS)

Contacting the radiotherapy department
Guy’s Radiotherapy Reception

St Thomas’ Radiotherapy Reception

Further support
Macmillan Information & Support Centre
Cicely Saunders Institute
King’s College Hospital
Denmark Hill
London SE5 9RS

British Lung Foundation

Cancer Research UK

Dimbleby Cancer Care

Macmillan Cancer Support (freephone)

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation
Dimbleby Cancer Care is the cancer support service for Guy’s and St Thomas’. They have drop-in information centres, and also offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice.

The drop-in information centre is located in Guy’s in Oncology Outpatients (Ground floor, Tabard Annexe).

t: 020 7188 5918 e: RichardDimblebyCentre@gstt.nhs.uk

Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/patientleaflets/cancer

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

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

PALS
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Ask a member of staff to direct you to PALS or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’ t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services
If you need an interpreter or information about the care you are receiving in the language or format of your choice, please get in touch using the following contact details:

t: 020 7188 8815 fax: 020 7188 5953 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future
Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk