Patient Information

For Radiotherapy Treatment of Skin Lesions (VMAT)
This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy treatment for skin lesions. It describes the radiotherapy planning and treatment. It also explains the effects that you may experience during and after treatment, and how best to cope with them. We treat each patient as an individual and the effects of treatment may vary from one patient to another. Your doctor and the radiographers will be able to explain your treatment in detail.

The length of your treatment course will depend on the type of skin lesion you are having treated. This can vary from one treatment to 35 treatments.

If you need more information or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.

**Preparation for Treatment**

If you are having an area of your head/face, neck or upper chest treated, it may be necessary to make a ‘mask’ or ‘beam directional shell’ (BDS).

The Mould room team will explain how the mask is made when you attend for your appointment. The process of making the mask is completely painless.
The radiographers use the marks on the mask to give your treatment to exactly the same area each day. The mask helps to keep you still during treatment. It is only worn during planning and treatment.

**Mould Room**

The Mould Room is where the mask is made. The process of making the mask will be explained to you in detail by the Mould room team when you go for your appointment.

Ladies may find it easier to wear a crop-top or vest, as you may need to take off your outer clothing down to your waist.

Gentlemen may find it easier to wear a collar-less top if you are having an area of your head, neck or face treated.

Gentlemen with a beard are advised to trim or shave it off before coming to the Mould Room as it is important that your skin is smooth before we start to make your mask. Please remember this is only if you are having your head, neck or face treated.

If necessary for your treatment, you may also be asked to use a ‘mouth bite’ which holds your jaw steady and helps protect your mouth from some of the effects of radiation.

**Treatment planning**

Before you begin your radiotherapy, the treatment must be carefully planned. This is done by taking a scan using a special x-ray machine called a CT Simulator. These scan images will be used to produce a unique treatment plan for your own individual needs.

Depending on the area being treated, it may be necessary for you to remove some items of clothing for the scan and
treatment. Your radiographers will keep you covered as much as possible. Your radiographers will help to position you on the CT couch. The position you will lie in will depend on the area being treated. Your radiographers will help to make you as comfortable as possible. Please let them know if you are uncomfortable, as you will need to lie in this position each day you come for treatment.

Your radiographers will put some pen marks on your skin or mask. They will also put some small markers on your skin or mask that will show up on your scan and help your doctor to plan your treatment.

Your radiographers will then move the couch into the correct position. They will leave the room to carry out the scan. They will be watching you all the time through a window. It is important that you remain as still and relaxed as possible. You can breathe normally.

Once the scan is finished, the radiographers will need to make any pen marks on your skin permanent. They do this by giving you small tattoos, which look like tiny freckles on your skin. These tattoos will be used every day to make sure you are in the correct position for your treatment. If you have a mask, these marks will be on your mask and not on your skin.

The whole process will last approximately 30 minutes.

**Treatment**

Your treatment radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts. Your treatment will be daily, Monday- Friday.

Each day you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT scanner. The radiographers leave the room while the machine is on but they
are monitoring you closely on closed circuit TV while your treatment is being delivered. You will not feel anything during treatment or immediately afterwards. Your treatment usually takes around 10 minutes. It is important that you stay as still as you can during treatment and breathe normally.

During your treatment, your radiographers will take images to make sure you are lying in exactly the right position. You will not get any results from these images or scans.

You will be reviewed by your doctor once a week while you are on treatment. If you have any problems or questions during your treatment, you can speak to your radiographers.

**General advice during treatment**

There is no reason to change your lifestyle during treatment but it may help to:

- Try to get enough rest and sleep, especially when the treatment begins to make you feel tired. It is also important that you try to continue with some of your normal daily activities. A sensible balance between rest and activity may be most beneficial. Research has shown that gentle exercise is also beneficial for people who have had a cancer diagnosis both in the short and longer term. There are programmes available that can help with this. Please let us know if you are interested in finding out more.

**Early effects of radiotherapy**

Each patient is individual and may experience the effects to differing degrees. Therefore, the following is a general guide to some of the effects you may experience.
• **Skin:** During radiotherapy, the area being treated will gradually respond in a way similar to an ‘inflammation’. The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive and may become pink, red, sore or itchy. The skin can sometimes blister and break. This tends to be a couple of weeks into treatment. If you require dressings on this area, the nursing staff here will do these for you.

• **Tiredness:** You may begin to feel tired during treatment. This tends to start 2-3 weeks into your course of treatment and may last for several weeks afterwards.

• **Hair:** There will be a loss of hair *only* in the treated area. This is *usually* temporary, although in some patients it may not re-grow.

**Skin Care during Treatment**

Radiotherapy *only affects* the skin that is within the area being treated and instructions on what to avoid apply only to that area.

• You may bath or shower during treatment, but don’t have the water too hot (lukewarm).

• You may use your usual soap and pat your skin dry with a soft towel.

• You may continue to wear deodorant, however if you are having your axilla (armpit) treated, we may advise you to stop using it.

• Avoid adding anything to the bath water, for example oils, dettol, savlon etc. as they may irritate your skin.

• You will find that you may be more comfortable if you wear loose fitting clothes, preferably with cotton next to your skin.
• If your skin becomes irritated, we can give you a cream to use. The skin irritation could last for 4-6 weeks.

• If treatment is within the scalp area, wash hair with a mild shampoo and allow the hair to dry naturally. If you want to use a hair dryer, use a cool setting. Avoid using tongs or hair straighteners.

• Shaving the area being treated may cause irritation. It is best to not shave. If you wish to shave use an electric razor during treatment and for a few weeks afterwards.

• If the weather is hot and sunny, avoid exposure to bright sunlight. For example, sit in the shade, wear sunglasses or a wide brimmed hat.

After Treatment Ends

When your treatment has finished, any side effects that may have developed can get slightly worse over the following few weeks, but will gradually settle. You may begin washing normally once your skin no longer looks red or feels itchy. Your radiotherapy doctor will arrange to see you about 6 weeks after your treatment ends.

Possible later effects of treatment

We believe that the benefits of your radiotherapy treatment outweigh any longer-term risks involved. However, you should be aware of these potential long-term effects, which may affect a small number of people. It is important to point out again that effects can vary from person to person and your doctor will explain specific individual issues to you personally. These can occur months or even years after treatment. The following effects are a general guide:
• You will always be sensitive to the effects of the sun; especially during the first year after your treatment (only in the area you had treated). Protect yourself with total sun block, sunglasses or a hat.
• Long-term risk of damage to the skin in the area treated.
• Skin pigmentation (lighter or darker in the area treated).
• Permanent loss of hair in area treated.
• Small veins may appear on the skin.
• Ulcers (these are very rare).

Where Can I Get Help?

Information and Support

All our staff are here to make sure your treatment goes as smoothly as possible and will try to help with any questions or problems you may have. Further specialist help is available from:

• Information and Support Radiographer
  Tel: 0141 301 7427

  If you have any questions about your radiotherapy treatment or would like to talk to someone please contact us. We can arrange to meet with you during your treatment.

• Information Radiographer and Counsellor  Tel: 0141 301 7423

• Information and Support Centre Tel:  0141 301 7390
  (Level 1 within the Beatson)

The Beatson Cancer Centre has a Radiotherapy Advice Line available for patients who have completed treatment. This is an answer phone service, available Monday – Friday. Please leave your name and telephone number and a radiographer will call you back as soon as possible. Tel: 0141 301 7432
The Cancer Centre also has a Cancer Treatment Helpline for urgent calls. This is for patients on or within 6 weeks of treatment who have urgent or severe symptoms such as -

- Shivering or flu-like symptoms.
- Temperature greater than 37.5°C.
- Gum/nose bleeds or unusual bruising.
- Worsening or sudden breathlessness.
- Leg weakness/difficulty walking.
- Severe nausea/vomiting/diarrhoea/constipation.
- Sudden increases or uncontrolled pain.
- Other concerning symptoms associated with your cancer treatment.

The line is available 24 hours for emergencies, although it would be helpful if you called early in the day if this is at all possible.

For Urgent Calls:
Beatson 8am-8pm Tel: 0141 301 7990
National 8pm-8am Tel: 0800 917 7711

Counselling and Clinical Psychology

This leaflet deals with the physical aspects of your treatment, but your emotional well-being is just as important to us. Being diagnosed with cancer can be a deeply distressing time for you and those closest to you. Within the department we have a counselling and clinical psychology service that can help with worries and difficulties you might be having. If you think this may be helpful to you, please ask staff to put you in touch.

There are also voluntary organisations providing information and support. These include;

- Macmillan Cancer Support. 0808 808 0000
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.

- **Maggie’s Gartnavel:** 0141 357 2269

- **Maggie’s Lanarkshire, Monklands Hospital** 01236 771199

- **Maggie’s Forth Valley:** 01324 868069
  Maggie’s Centre provides a comprehensive cancer support programme for people and their families affected by cancer.

- **Cancer Support Scotland – (Tak Tent), The Calman Centre, Gartnavel Complex. Freephone 0800 652 4531 or 0141 337 8199.**
  Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available. [www.cancersupportscotland.org](http://www.cancersupportscotland.org)

- **Macmillan Benefits Team** (within the Beatson) 0141 301 7374
  Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.

- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit: [www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive)

- **Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre** – if you want to find out more about our Centre please visit [www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk)

- **NHS 24 111**