

Pulse Dose Rate (PDR) Brachytherapy treatment - information for patients with cervical cancer

Introduction

Brachytherapy has been prescribed for you as a treatment option for your cancer. This leaflet aims to explain the treatment and answer the most frequently asked questions. Please refer any questions to the team caring for you. The team consists of your Radiation Oncologist, Brachytherapy Scheduler, Nursing Staff, Radiation Therapists and Physicist.

What is Brachytherapy?

It is an internal radiation therapy or implant therapy using low dose radiation. Brachytherapy is used to help control local disease, and to treat areas at higher risk of recurrence of the cancer, whilst preserving vital organ function and minimising normal surrounding tissue damage.

What is PDR?

Pulse Dose Radiation (PDR) delivers small doses (pulses) of radiation at a given frequency, usually hourly, over a period of days, usually 40-50 hours here at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital in a designated suite. This type of treatment does not make you or your bodily fluids radioactive.

You have been recommended to have this form of treatment by your Radiation Oncologist and the Gynaecology Multidisciplinary Team at the RBWH and/or your Radiation Oncologist at the Mater Public Hospital.

When is treatment given?

Brachytherapy is generally given 1-3 weeks after finishing your external radiation. This gives you time to recover following external radiation treatment and provide the best chance of cure.



How is it done?

The specialised metal rods used for Brachytherapy are inserted into the vagina, cervix and uterus. This is done under an Anaesthetic in theatre by your Radiation Oncologist. You may have gauze packing put in the vagina to keep the implant in place. A small tube known as an indwelling catheter (IDC) will be passed into your bladder to take away urine.

The whole procedure takes 20-30 minutes. From recovery you will be escorted to Radiation treatment unit (level 3) to have a scan to ensure the metal rods are in place. You will then be escorted to Ward 5C to have your treatment. Your Radiation Oncologist and Physicist will explain the procedure to you before commencing treatment.

The implant may feel uncomfortable when it is inserted, and you will be offered medication for pain relief. If you are in pain it is important to call the nurses and request pain relief. During the time the implant is in, you **won't be able to sit upright in bed**.

You will be required to wear compression stockings to aid blood circulation in your legs. These will be fitted with the help of a nurse in theatre.



You will be alone in a treatment room when you receive Brachytherapy. This safety measure may make you feel isolated and frightened at a time when you would like people around you. Talking on the phone, reading or sharing your feelings with nurses may help pass the time. It is a good idea to bring in plenty of activities to keep you busy like reading, cross words, DVD and watching television (\$10-\$15 a day). Prior to your treatment a Gynaecology Psychologist will call you to offer any emotional assistance, if needed. The nurses can visit you when you are not receiving a pulse.



Do I have to come into hospital?

Yes, you will need to stay in hospital for 2-3 days depending on the number of pulse doses your oncologist has planned for you.

You will be admitted into ward 5C Joyce Tweddell Building, in a private room with a small refrigerator allowing you to bring any special food items. A telephone is provided for incoming calls Ph 07 3646 4527 and you may make outgoing calls by purchasing a Telstra Phone away card prior to admission.

Before admission to hospital

Approximately 2-4 weeks prior to admission

- You will attend the surgical Pre-admission clinic.
- Appointment with your treating Radiation Oncologist.
- Education session by Oncology Nurses and information booklets provided to you.
- Discharge education: Pain, bleeding, risk of infection and use of dilators.
- You will need to follow a low fibre diet at least 2 days prior to admission.
- You will be required to administer an enema on the evening before and morning of theatre ensuring your bowels are empty

Day of admission

- You will be required to present to General admissions, Ground Floor Ned Hanlon Building.
- Post procedure you will then be taken to Ward 5C Joyce Tweddell Building
- Nursing staff will give you education regarding procedure, treatment, nursing care, environment and isolation
- If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask a member of your health care team.

Things to bring into hospital

- Comfortable night gowns – not pyjamas
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Toiletries
- Hairbrush/comb
- Biscuits, lollies, and any low fibre diet options
- Books, magazines, crosswords, laptops, photos, etc
- Telephone numbers to keep in touch with friends and family
- Mobile phone

What should I tell my relatives?

Whilst in hospital you will be cared for in an isolation room. You will not be allowed visitors during your stay. Friends and family can call you, and you may keep in contact with them by phone.

They can contact you directly on (07) 3646 4527.

Would I be able to eat and drink?

You will be required to be Nil By Mouth 6 hours prior to the procedure. During your treatment you will be on a special diet "LOW FIBRE DIET" to slow down your bowels. A separate "Low Fibre Diet" leaflet will be provided to you by your nurse.

You can have plenty of fluids and ask nursing staff to provide coffee or tea with your meals.

You will not be able to drink orange or prune juice.

Food will be provided by nursing staff and will assist you as you will not be able to sit up. The head of the bed can be raised to 30 degrees to avoid trauma or damage by the implants to surrounding tissue or organs.

What about my personal hygiene?

The nursing staff on the ward will be able to assist you with personal hygiene such as changing your night gowns, washing in bed and brushing your teeth. They will be able to do this when you are not receiving a radiation pulse.

What can I do to help?

Notify the nursing staff of any concerns, for example, pain or nausea. Notify the nursing staff if you feel you need to move your bowels, this will allow time for nurses to provide medication to decrease the urge.

You can change position in the bed, from side to side to avoid pressure sores. However, you must buzz/call for the nursing staff to assist.

Perform Deep Breathing Exercises and Passive leg exercises while resting in bed. The nurses will explain this to you.

N.B You will **not be allowed** sit up or get out of bed as the rods may cause trauma or damage to your organs and surrounding tissue

Discharge from hospital

When treatment is completed, your Radiation Oncologist will disconnect the machine; remove the urinary catheter and Brachytherapy rods. The removal of rods and catheter may be uncomfortable; the nursing staff will give you pain relief prior to removal of the Brachytherapy rods.

You will be required to sit up in bed until you regain your balance. At this stage you will be able to have a shower and change into your normal clothes. Nursing staff can assist if required.

Discharge education will be given to you by your consultant and the nurses caring for you. We will assist you in notifying relatives of your discharge time and arrange your pickup. Advise the nursing staff when you are leaving.

PLEASE NOTE – It is normal to feel a little uncomfortable or experience some spotting on discharge.

If you experience severe bleeding, pain, fever, painful urination, burning or smelly abnormal discharge - seek medical advice promptly

Contact numbers

Clinical Nurse Consultant

Phone: 073646 6979 (Mon-Fri)

Mobile: 0458 820 755

Ward 5C

Phone: 07 3646 8802 (24 hours)

Appointments

Phone: 07 3646 7751