

Radiotherapy department

# Information for patients receiving radiotherapy for bone pain

Your oncologist has advised radiotherapy to help ease your bone pain caused by bone metastases (secondary cancer). This leaflet is intended as a guide because the timing and effects of treatment vary from one person to another.

## How does the treatment work?

Secondary bone cancer cells cause thinning of the bone by damaging healthy bone cells. These areas may be painful and can sometimes lead to fractures. Radiotherapy has been used effectively for many years to treat pain caused by tumour deposits in bones.

Radiotherapy uses high energy X-rays and is painless. The treatment will destroy cancer cells and strengthen the bone, which will allow the bone to heal over a period of time.

## What are the benefits of this treatment?

**Radiotherapy is not an immediate answer to pain.** Some people notice improvement in their pain two weeks after treatment, but it may take 4-6 weeks to feel the full benefit. Your pain may go completely or you may notice some improvement.

## Things you need to know before you come for treatment

- If you need ambulance transport for your first visit, please phone the transport liaison office at the hospital you are attending as soon as you get your appointment (the numbers are on page 3).
- Please remember to bring all your painkillers so that you can take a dose if needed while you are at The Christie.
- If you have bad pain on movement, please ask for help from your GP, district nurse or Macmillan nurse **BEFORE** your visit.
- This treatment may be offered at The Christie in Withington, The Christie at Salford or The Christie at Oldham.

## What can I expect on my visit?

When you come to The Christie you will meet a radiographer or doctor who will check where your pain seems to be coming from. Sometimes more X-rays will be needed before a final decision can be made about the area to be treated.

**Radiation can be harmful to the unborn child. It is important to let the radiographers know if you have missed a period or suspect that you might be pregnant before you are exposed to any radiation**



## Treatment planning CT scan

- We plan your treatment carefully to make sure the X-rays are targeted accurately.
- The radiographer will ask you to lie on a hard CT bed under a CT scanner.
- A scan will be taken of the area to be treated.
- The radiographer will apply some temporary pen marks to your skin.
- If you agree, the radiographer will also make tiny permanent tattoo marks on the skin – but not on the face or neck. This will not be very noticeable, but it is an important way of locating treated areas in the future.
- For some patients, we may not need to take X-rays or a scan as we will simply draw around the painful area, for example if we are giving treatment to ribs.
- **You will be given the date and time of your treatment after the scan.**

## The treatment

You will lie in the same position for your treatment. Radiotherapy is given by a machine called a linear accelerator.

- The radiographers will move the treatment bed and machine into position.
- The treatment machine will not touch you, and will move around you to enable the treatment to be given at different angles.
- You will be in the treatment room about 10 -15 minutes, but the treatment takes 1 - 3 minutes to treat.
- You will not feel anything – it is just like having an ordinary X-ray.
- **It is important that you keep still throughout your treatment and breathe normally.**
- The radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on.
- You will be alone in the room during treatment, but don't worry as the radiographers are close by and will watch you closely on monitors.
- If you need help the radiographers will give you instructions of what to do, such as raising your arm to signal to them.
- Most patients have beneficial pain relief from one treatment session, occasionally, we may decide to give you up to 10 sessions.

## Side effects

Radiotherapy treatment is painless, but there can be side-effects. We would encourage you to drink regular clear fluids.

### Skin reaction

The skin reaction in the area being treated may become red, dry, itchy and may begin to peel. Please ask for a copy of 'Skincare during and after your radiotherapy treatment'.

### Nausea/vomiting and diarrhoea

If the treatment is likely to cause sickness or vomiting, the staff will provide anti sickness medication to take before treatment.

If you experience diarrhoea, team treating you or your GP can prescribe medicines to help.

### Fatigue and lethargy

As treatment progresses you may feel tired and develop fatigue. Please contact the information centre for a copy of the Macmillan booklet 'Coping with fatigue'. Also available to view on the Macmillan website [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

### Pain

You may experience some 'pain flare' in the area of treatment one to two weeks after treatment, and you may need to adjust your painkillers during this time.

## Treatment review

A medical team consisting of either doctors, nurses and radiographers are available everyday if you have a specific problem with your treatment or side effects.

## After the treatment

It is important to continue to take your painkillers. Improvement is usually gradual and you should not be in a hurry to stop them. As the pain reduces, it may be possible to gradually reduce the dose with your doctors or nurses.

You may have an appointment arranged with your oncologist or continue care under your GP and/ or local community teams.

## Student training

The Christie is a training centre for postgraduate and undergraduate trainees so you may meet students in all areas of the hospital. We train doctors, nurses, radiographers and other therapists in the treatment and care of cancer patients. Placements at The Christie are an important part of student training, so by allowing them to assist in your care you will be making a valuable contribution to student education. Students are always supervised by fully qualified staff. However, you have the right to decide if students can take part in your care. If you prefer them not to, please tell the doctor, nurse, radiographer or other therapist in charge as soon as possible. You have a right to do this and your treatment will not be affected in any way.

We also try to respect the concerns of patients in relation to the gender of their doctor and other health professionals.

## Contacts

Post treatment problems and transport queries:

Radiotherapy reception at Oldham - **0161 918 7700**

Radiotherapy reception at Salford - **0161 918 7800**

Post treatment problems at Withington - **0161 446 3485**

Transport at Withington - **0161 446 8114** or **8143**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **[the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net)**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week