



## Information for patients receiving radiotherapy for bone pain

### Introduction

Your oncologist has advised radiotherapy to help ease your bone pain caused by bone metastases or 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 can cause thinning of areas of the bone by damaging healthy bone cells. These areas may be painful and can sometimes even lead to fractures. Radiotherapy has been used effectively for many years to treat pain caused by tumour deposits in bones.

If we can locate the source of the pain, radiotherapy can be given to this area. This is treatment using high energy x-rays which is quite painless. The treatment will destroy cancer cells and strengthen the bone, which will allow the bone to heal over a period of time.

This treatment may be offered at the radiotherapy departments at The Christie at Withington, The Christie at Salford or The Christie at Oldham.

### Agreeing to treatment

#### Consent

We will ask you to sign a consent form agreeing to accept the treatment that you are being offered. The basis of the agreement is that you have had The Christie's written description of the proposed treatment and that you have been given an opportunity to discuss any concerns. You are entitled to request a second opinion from another doctor who specialises in treating this cancer. You can ask your own consultant or your GP to refer you. Your consent may be withdrawn at any time before or during this treatment. Should you decide to withdraw your consent then a member of your treating team will discuss the possible consequences with you.

#### What are the benefits of this treatment?

Some people find their pain goes completely, and most people notice some improvement. This is usually apparent two weeks after treatment, but may take up to 4 to 6 weeks for the full benefit.

**Radiotherapy is not an immediate answer to pain.** If you are finding things difficult you should see your GP for help.

#### Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

Depending on the type of cancer, other treatments may be used, such as hormone treatment or chemotherapy or treatment with strontium 89. The radiotherapy described in this leaflet can still be used in addition to treat localised painful areas.

## 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 for advice as soon as you get your appointment. Contact The Christie on: **0161 446 8114** or **8143**, The Christie at Salford on: **0161 918 7800** or The Christie at Oldham on: **0161 918 7700**.
- If you have transport problems once you have started treatment, please also contact the transport office of the hospital you are attending.
- If you are feeling too unwell to come for your treatment, please contact us as soon as possible before your appointment. The Christie on: **0161 446 3485**, The Christie at Oldham on: **0161 918 7700** or The Christie at Salford on: **0161 918 7800**.
- You are welcome to bring one friend or relative with you to The Christie. It is better not to bring children.
- Please remember to bring all your painkillers so that you can take a dose if needed while you are at The Christie. Remember to bring your quick acting painkillers if you are taking these. It also helps staff to give you advice if they know exactly what you are taking.
- The Christie staff do their best to help you get into a comfortable position for treatment, but this does involve getting on and off quite hard beds. If you have bad pain on movement, please ask for help from your GP, district nurse or Macmillan nurse **BEFORE** your visit to The Christie so they can try to control the pain better.

## What can I expect on my visit?

Your oncologist has suggested that radiotherapy will help you. We will send you an appointment letter with a date to attend The Christie as soon as possible, but this may take 2 to 4 weeks.

When you come to The Christie you will meet a radiographer who will have all the information about your case. He or she will see you first and 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. This is because pain felt in one part of the body can arise from somewhere else. It may also be because there is new pain in a different place. If necessary, a doctor will be available to see you.

## Treatment planning

We plan your treatment carefully to make sure the x-rays are targeted accurately. The radiographer will ask you to lie on a bed under a CT scanner. A scan will be taken of the area to be treated. This area may then be marked on your skin with a felt-tipped pen. (When the treatment has finished, you can let the pen marks wear off, but do not scrub them off as you could make your skin sore). The radiographer will also make a tiny permanent mark 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.

## The treatment

You will have your treatment in exactly the same position as when it was planned, using a machine called a linear accelerator. The radiographers will move the couch and treatment machine into position. The treatment machine may come close to you but it will not touch you. The machine will then move around you to enable the treatment to take place at different angles.

Each area takes from one to three minutes to treat and you will have the same areas treated each day. You will be in the treatment room about 10-15 minutes. The treatment itself will only take a few minutes. You will not feel any discomfort – 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. Then the machine will be switched off and the radiographers will return to the room to assist you. Treatment will resume later as planned.

Most patients have beneficial pain relief after only one treatment session. Very occasionally, we may decide to give up to 10 sessions. If so, the doctor will explain this to you.

## **Side effects**

Radiotherapy treatment is painless however there can be some side-effects and you may notice one or more of them gradually developing over the course of the treatment.

### **Skin reaction**

Some people develop a skin reaction in the area being treated. The area may become red, dry, itchy and may begin to peel. For further information please ask a member of staff for a copy of 'Skincare during and after your radiotherapy treatment'.

### **Nausea / vomiting and diarrhoea**

You may feel sick if you have radiotherapy to the spine or ribs that are near the stomach or the tummy (abdomen) area. To help control sickness the team treating you can prescribe anti-sickness drugs. You may find that taking an anti-sickness tablet an hour before your treatment helps. If you are having treatment to your hips (pelvis), or your bowel is in the treatment area, you may have some diarrhoea. The team treating you or your own GP can prescribe medicines to help control this.

### **Fatigue and lethargy**

As treatment progresses you may feel tired and develop fatigue. This is a tiredness which is not entirely relieved by resting and can make physical activity difficult. Lethargy may continue for a few weeks after radiotherapy. Some of the things that can contribute to fatigue are:

- travelling to the hospital for treatment
- change to your daily routine
- change to your eating habits
- dehydration
- reduced physical activity
- interrupted sleep
- emotions - like feeling low in mood and isolated

Even so, it is beneficial for your health to take gentle exercise as well as ensuring you rest.

## **Pain**

You may experience some “pain flare” in the area of treatment. This is a swelling around the treatment area in the days following treatment. It can cause a temporary increase in pain and tenderness. As radiotherapy may not help relieve your pain until one to two weeks after your treatment your painkillers may need to be adjusted during this time.

Side-effects that you have experienced may get worse for a short while after treatment before settling down. Do not worry this is quite normal. During this time you should follow the advice you have been given during treatment.

## **Treatment review**

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

## **After the treatment**

When you return home, rest and take things easy for the next couple of days. 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 will be possible to gradually reduce the dose. Your doctor will give you advice about this.

Most patients have a follow-up outpatient appointment - usually six weeks after treatment. This may be with your oncologist or the doctor at your local hospital. We hope that you will be feeling more comfortable by then.

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.

## **Student training**

The Christie is a training centre for postgraduate and undergraduate trainees so you may meet male and female 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**

If you have any questions or concerns about your side effects, please call on the numbers below:

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

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

Radiotherapy reception at Withington: **0161 446 3485**

Out of hours (evenings and weekends), please contact The Christie Hotline on: **0161 446 3658**

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.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **patient.information@christie.nhs.uk**

For more information about The Christie and our services, please visit **www.christie.nhs.uk** or visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford.

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

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