

Radiotherapy to the bones (short course)

Radiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet

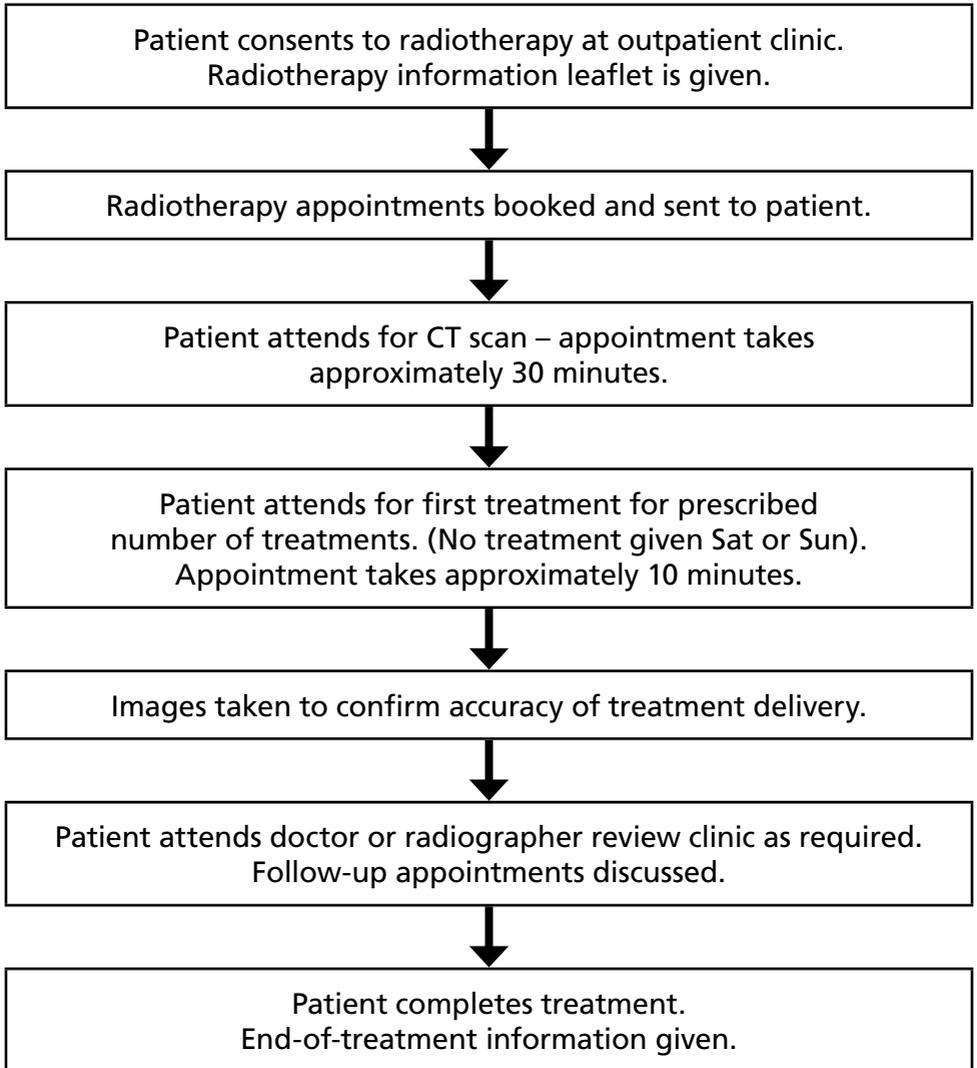
What does this leaflet cover?

Introduction	4
Who is this leaflet for?	4
What is radiotherapy and how does it work?	5
What happens before radiotherapy starts?	6
Planning your treatment	7
■ Oncology CT scanner	7
Why doesn't my treatment start straight away?	8
First day of treatment	8
Preparing for the treatment	8
The treatment	8
Gulmay treatment	10
What sort of side effects might I have, and for how long?	11
What happens when treatment ends?	13
Where can I find further support?	14
Contact numbers	15
Additional information	16
Questions and notes – for you to write down any comments or questions you may wish to ask when you visit the hospital.	18

Please see the department's website for additional information. The site also provides information on recent patient surveys carried out in the department and any actions arising from the results.

www.royalsurrey.nhs.uk/st-lukes

Patient Pathway – Short Course Treatments



St Luke's Cancer Centre

Please be aware that St Luke's Cancer Centre has two Radiotherapy Departments. One is located at the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford and the other at East Surrey Hospital in Redhill. Please refer to your appointment letters for the location of all your appointments. All information contained in this leaflet is relevant to both sites.

Introduction

Your clinical oncologist has decided that a short course of radiotherapy would help your symptoms and make you feel better. Radiotherapy can be very good at relieving the pain and swelling associated with bone metastases. When recommending radiotherapy, your doctor takes into account any problems you may run into if no radiotherapy is given. While the treatment may have some side effects, it is felt that the advantages for you would outweigh the disadvantages.

At this stage your clinical oncologist will probably have discussed with you the risks and benefits of undergoing a course of radiotherapy and you may have been presented with a consent form to sign agreeing to have the treatment.

The short and long term risks of receiving radiotherapy to your bones are outlined towards the end of this leaflet.

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients having a short course of treatment to the bones.

Please be aware that your treatment will be tailor-made for your specific needs. It may differ slightly from what is described in this leaflet, and also from what another patient with a similar diagnosis may be having. You will have the opportunity to talk to a radiographer before your radiotherapy is planned and again before you start your first treatment. You may also request to see your doctor if you wish.

What is radiotherapy and how does it work?

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy x-rays or electrons (ionising radiation) to treat tumours. It is usually delivered from a machine called a linear accelerator (or Linac for short). See photograph 1.

Most commonly it is given externally with you lying on a treatment couch. Carefully calculated doses of radiation are directed to a specific part of your body. Accurate planning of your radiotherapy means that the treatment is very localised and targeted, avoiding as much normal tissue as possible.

However, some normal tissue will be affected and may cause side effects. Most side effects are temporary as normal tissue is able to repair itself. External beam radiotherapy is a very quick and usually painless treatment.



Photograph 1

What are the alternatives?

You may decide that you do not want to have radiotherapy; this is an option you can choose. Talk again with your doctor if you wish and let him/her know what you have decided.

You may request a second opinion on your diagnosis or treatment at any time during your consultation or treatment process. Please speak to your clinical oncologist or GP.

What happens before radiotherapy starts?

Following your initial out-patient appointment with the doctor you will be sent a letter asking you to attend the radiotherapy department for a pre-treatment appointment. This appointment will be for the **Oncology CT Scanner**. For some patients the appointment will be for a machine called **Gulmay**.

Please check your appointment letter for the exact location of your appointment. It is helpful to bring your appointment letter and a dressing gown with you. Please arrive 20 minutes before your appointment time.

A member of the pre-treatment radiotherapy team will explain what is going to happen and give you a further opportunity to discuss your treatment and side effects before proceeding with the treatment preparation. However, if you feel you have questions that you would like to address to the doctor, a radiographer can organise a meeting for you.

During this discussion you will be asked to confirm your name, address and date of birth. **You will be asked for this information before every procedure or treatment undertaken in the department.** The following issues will also be addressed:

- **Confirmation of consent:** you will probably have already signed a consent form with your clinical oncologist. That consent will be re-confirmed with a radiographer prior to your first planning session, to ensure that you agree to proceed with the proposed treatment.
- **Pacemakers:** If you have a pacemaker and you did NOT discuss this with your clinical oncologist when you signed the radiotherapy consent form please phone the CT scanner to let them know. The number is at the end of this information leaflet. It is safe to give radiotherapy to patients who have a pacemaker but there are a few precautions we may need to take. The radiotherapy department will send you an information sheet entitled 'Pacemakers and Radiotherapy' for you to read and keep with your other patient information leaflets. This leaflet will explain why extra precautions may be needed and what those precautions may be. It will also highlight any extra appointments you may need to attend the hospital for. Please bring your pacemaker ID card to your CT or Gulmay appointment.

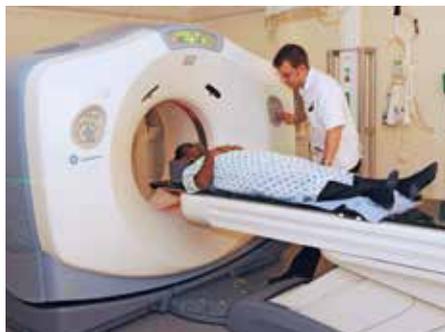
- **Pregnancy:** all female patients under the age of 55 will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status before the first planning session starts. It is very important that you **are not and do not become** pregnant while undergoing radiotherapy planning and treatment. If you think you may be pregnant at any time during your course of treatment please tell your clinical oncologist or radiographer immediately. If necessary please speak to your doctor about contraception methods suitable for use during radiotherapy.

If you have received an appointment for **Gulmay** please skip to the section that discusses **Gulmay** (page 10).

Planning your treatment

Oncology CT scanner

Photograph 2 shows the CT scanner. The CT scanner enables the doctor and radiographers to accurately plan your treatment.



Photograph 2

- The radiographers may go in and out of the room several times during the procedure and you will hear them talking over you during the setting up process.
- They are able to hear and see you at all times so if you need to communicate with them call out or raise your arm.
- At the end of the session the radiographers will, with your permission, place two or three small permanent ink dots under the skin around the area to receive treatment. These marks will not come off your skin but they do fade over time. Radiographers on the treatment units will use these permanent marks to make sure that you are correctly positioned on the couch on each visit and to ensure an accurate treatment.
- Very occasionally, in order to show clearly how you are positioned on the couch, the radiographers may take a digital photograph of you. They will get your permission for this beforehand and the image will only be accessible by the radiographers.
- The CT scanner procedure is painless and takes about 30 minutes.

Why doesn't my treatment start straight away?

After your planning scan, the images are sent to a specialised computer system. Your oncologist will define the exact area to be treated. The rest of the planning is carried out by planning radiographers and physicists. They will determine the best field arrangement and create shaped beams to direct the radiation on the area to be treated, while avoiding as much healthy tissue as possible.

First day of treatment

Please check your appointment letter for the exact location of your appointment. It is helpful to bring your appointment letter and a dressing gown with you. Please arrive 20 minutes early on your first day.

When you arrive for your appointment please book in at reception and you will be directed to the treatment waiting area. One of the treatment team will greet you and discuss your treatment with you. This discussion provides a good opportunity to ask questions that may have arisen since your last appointment. There is space at the end of this leaflet to write down anything you may want to ask.

You will be given a list of all your treatment appointment times, including doctor and radiographer review clinics. A treatment course can vary from a single treatment to daily treatment for 10 days. Your doctor will have discussed with you the exact number of treatments you are to have.

Preparing for the treatment

Prior to the treatment the radiographer will ask you to go into a changing room, remove clothing from the area to be treated and put on your dressing gown.

The treatment

The radiographer will call you into the treatment room, introduce you to all the team members present and ask you to lie on the treatment couch. The radiographers will then begin to get you into the correct position. See photograph 3.

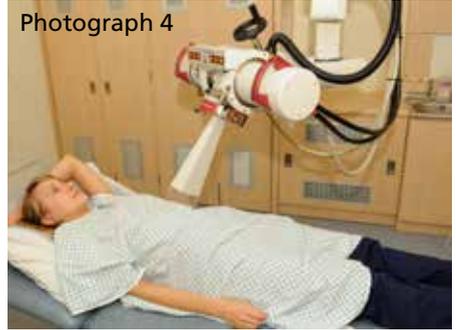
- The radiographers may come in and out of the room several times during the treatment and you will hear them talking over you during the setting up process.
- They are able to hear and see you at all times so if you need to communicate with them call out or raise your arm.
- When you are positioned correctly the treatment couch will be quite high up (about 4.5 ft). Therefore it is very important you do not move or attempt to get off the couch. The radiographers will tell you when it is safe to sit up and get off the couch.
- The whole procedure will take approximately 10-20 minutes.
- All treatment rooms have a CD player so feel free to bring your own music along if you wish.



Gulmay treatment

Some patients may have their bone metastases treated on a machine called Gulmay (see photograph 4).

This machine produces medium energy x-rays and is particularly suited to treating patients with pain in the ribs or sternum (breast bone).



- For patients receiving treatment on Gulmay the planning and first treatment usually happen on the same day.
- Your doctor will place pen marks on your skin, showing the exact area to be treated.
- The doctor will decide the radiation dose to be given and the number of days it is to be given over. The radiographers will calculate the time required for each treatment. This may take a little while.
- The radiographers will then begin to get you in the right position. The machine will rest on your skin. It is very important that you keep very still during the setting up process and the actual treatment.
- Once everything is in the correct position the radiographers will leave the room and close the door.
- They can see you the whole time via a CCTV system. If you need them during the treatment please wave a free arm.
- Treatment times do vary from patient to patient, but an average is about 7 minutes long.
- Once the treatment is complete the radiographers will record the exact location of the treated area. This will involve taking measurements, taking a tracing of the area using a plastic sheet, and sometimes a digital photograph. Your permission will be sought for the photograph. It will only be accessible by the radiographers treating you.

- The whole appointment usually takes about 40 minutes.
- Normally a patient would have a single session of treatment to the affected area.

What sort of side effects might I have, and for how long?

Although modern planning and treatment methods have helped us to reduce side effects, most people still experience some effects of radiotherapy. Side effects are closely related to the exact area of body being treated and their severity depends on the dose and number of treatments given.

Short term risks

These effects normally occur while a patient is on treatment, or shortly afterwards. They normally resolve about 2-3 weeks after the last treatment has been given.

- **Increase in pain:** treatment can cause an initial increase in pain in the area being treated. This can be very distressing, but adequate pain relief can be prescribed to help manage this problem. This pain 'flare' should begin to reduce a couple of days after the first treatment.

A reduction in pain and an increase in mobility or/and return of sensation (if lost) would hopefully be expected 2-3 weeks after the treatment has finished.

- **Nausea/sickness:** if you are to have the lower part of your spine treated then you may feel nauseous after the first treatment. Anti-sickness medication can be prescribed so please discuss this with the radiographers. If your doctor thinks that nausea may be a problem, you may be given a prescription before you start your first treatment.

- **Loose bowels:** again, if you are to have the lower part of your spine treated you may notice your bowels become a bit looser. If necessary you will be offered medication that can help with the diarrhoea and any discomfort. It is also very important to drink plenty in order to replace the fluids you have lost. You can continue to eat normally. Your bowel habit should begin to return to normal a few weeks after treatment is completed.
- **Sore throat/indigestion:** this may occur if you are having the upper part of your spine treated. It normally occurs about a week after treatment and then resolves quickly.
- **Skin soreness:** this can occur particularly if you are having a single treatment. The skin in the area being treated may become pink and hot for a few days after treatment. Use plain water to wash in the area. Using a moisturiser can help to soothe the skin and a suitable moisturiser will be recommended to you by the radiographers on your first day. Do not use a hot water bottle in the area or soak in a hot bath while a skin reaction is present.
- **Hair loss:** towards the end of your treatment, or once it is finished, you will begin to lose any hair you had in the treatment area. It may start to re-grow 3 months after your last treatment. In some cases the hair loss may be permanent.
- **Tiredness:** it is quite common to feel more tired than usual while having radiotherapy. Rest if you need to, but if you feel OK carry on with all your normal daily activities.

As your treatment progresses the radiographers will be talking to you each day to find out how you are feeling. This is so they may offer help and support if the treatment gives you any problems. Please feel free to discuss all issues that may be concerning you.

Long term risks

A short course of radiotherapy is unlikely to produce any long term side effects as the amount of radiation you receive is relatively small.

What happens when treatment ends?

- On the last day of your treatment a radiographer will explain that the treatment will carry on working for another 2-3 weeks. Any short term side effects may even get slightly more marked during this time. After that they should gradually subside.
- The radiographer will make sure you have a follow-up appointment with your clinical oncologist. This may be at a hospital nearer to your home.
- You will be given a leaflet and two copies of your radiotherapy discharge summary. One copy is for your records and the other for you to give to your GP. In due course a letter summarising your treatment in more detail will be sent through the post to your GP.
- Please remember you are free to contact the department at any time after your treatment has finished should you have any concerns or questions. Contact numbers are at the end of this leaflet.
- Please do not book a holiday too close to the end of your treatment in case the treatment does not finish on the date originally listed on your appointment schedule. This also allows you time to recover from any side effects experienced.

Where can I get further support?

Further support can be given by the various support centres at locations in Guildford, Crawley and Purley. These centres provide information, complementary therapies, support groups and one to one support.

To find out more contact the individual centres or ask radiotherapy department staff for a leaflet.

- **The Fountain Centre** is located in St Luke's Cancer Centre at Guildford.
Telephone: 01483 406618
Website: www.fountaincentre.org
- **The Olive Tree** is located in Crawley Hospital, Crawley.
Telephone: 01293 534466
Website: www.olivetreecancersupport.org.uk
- **The East Surrey Macmillan Cancer Support Centre** is located at East Surrey Hospital.
Telephone: 01737 304176
Email: informationcentre.sash@nhs.net
- **South East Cancer Help Centre** is located in Purley, Surrey.
Telephone: 020 86680974
Website: www.sechc.org.uk

Other support websites and groups

- Cancer Research UK
Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org
Telephone: 0808 800 4040
- Macmillan Cancer Support
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk
Telephone: 0808 808 0000
- Surrey Primary Care Trust
Stop Smoking Service
Telephone: 0845 602 3608

Useful telephone numbers

Telephone numbers across both sites (Guildford/Redhill)

Treatment appointments 01483 571122 ext 6632

Onslow Ward (out-of-hours) 01483 571122 ext 6858

For urgent enquiries (out- of-hours) call hospital switchboard on **01483 571122** and ask operator to bleep **on-call oncology SHO**.

Guildford numbers

Radiotherapy Reception 01483 406600

Oncology CT scanner 01483 406630

Patient Support Office 01483 571122 ext 2066

Redhill numbers

Radiotherapy Reception 01737 277311

Oncology CT Scanner 01737 768511 ext 1202

Patient Support Office 01737 277315

Additional information

- In order to improve treatments and services, audits are regularly carried out in the department. This can involve using patient notes. The notes will have all identifiable details removed to ensure patient confidentiality. However, if this is unacceptable to you please let your consultant know so your wishes can be respected.
- Clinical trials are undertaken within the department. If appropriate your doctor will discuss this with you.
- If you require this information in a different format or language please let a member of staff know as soon as possible.
- Staff at St Luke's Cancer Centre cannot take responsibility for patient belongings brought into the hospital. Please keep all your personal belongings with you at all times. Please leave valuables at home.
- If you wish to make a comment or complaint about any aspect of the treatment or services provided by St. Luke's Cancer Centre and its staff please speak to a member of St. Luke's. Alternatively you can visit, email, phone or write to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Their contact details are:

The **PALS office** can be found in the main hospital reception area.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Write to:

PALS Manager,
Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust, Egerton Road, Guildford,
GU2 7XX

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.uk

Website: www.royalsurrey.nhs.uk

You may also write to the Chief Executive of the Trust at:

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust, Egerton Road, Guildford,
GU2 7XX

Reference sources

- Radiotherapy Clinical Protocol – Palliative Radiotherapy – Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust 2017
- Radiotherapy for Bone Pain – Cancer Research UK 2016
- Metastatic spinal cord compression: Diagnosis and management of adults at risk of and with metastatic spinal cord compression – NICE Guidelines 2014

Radiotherapy contact details

Radiotherapy reception

Telephone: 01483 406 600

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Author: Elizabeth West

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