



Information for patients receiving palliative radiation therapy

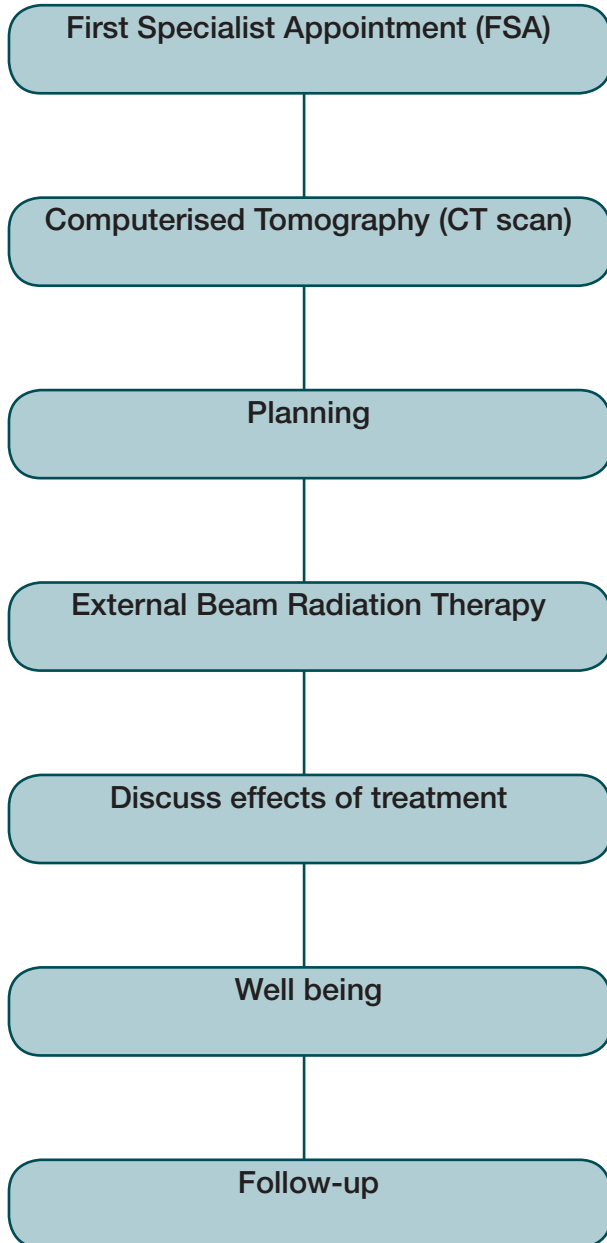


Waikato Regional Cancer Centre



Welcome to Waikato Regional Cancer Centre. The aim of this booklet is to provide information on the Radiation Therapy treatment procedure and to explain the journey from your first meeting with the radiation oncologist to the completion of your treatment.

Radiation Therapy



What is Radiation Therapy?

Radiation therapy is the use of high energy x-rays to damage the DNA (genetic code) in the cancer cells. Radiation therapy is planned to treat as little of the normal cells in the body as possible.

Each treatment visit of radiation therapy is called a fraction. The number of treatment fractions varies depending on an individual needs and the area been treated. The radiation therapy treatment is sometimes delivered in one day, but often over one week or a few weeks.

Palliative radiation therapy is useful for symptoms or problems such as:

- metastatic bone pain
- a tumour pressing on a vital structure (spinal cord)
- a tumour that has ulcerated through the skin
- metastatic brain tumours
- large tumours that are causing pain

Palliative radiation therapy may also be used to prevent the development of some of the above symptoms before they occur.

First Specialist Appointment (FSA)

Your doctor (radiation oncologist or their registrar) will explain their radiation therapy procedure to you. Your diagnosis, treatment options and potential side effects of treatment will be discussed. If you agree to having radiation therapy treatment, a form will be signed to record that this discussion occurred. For the potential side effects please refer to section 'Effects of Treatment' on page 5 in this brochure.

Computerised Tomography (CT scan)



A CT scan is performed in order to deliver the treatment accurately and at the correct dose. We need to be able to locate the area that needs to be treated in relation to the surrounding normal tissue in the body. You will be set up in a comfortable position that will be reproduced when you come for your treatment.

At the CT scan small permanent tattoo marks will be given, photos taken of your position and measurements recorded to assist in the daily set-up for treatment.

Please inform a member of staff if there is any possibility that you could be pregnant.

Planning

Using the information obtained from the CT scan, an individual plan is produced. The area to be treated is determined on the computer planning system. We calculate the best method and beam arrangement for the dose of radiation to be delivered, while at the same time avoiding as much normal tissue as possible. Time is required for the planning calculations and checks to be done. Treatment is started as soon as possible following the completion of this process.

Treatment - External Radiation Therapy



At treatment you will be set-up in the same position you were in at your planning CT scan. Your treatment requires specific positioning, so it is important to relax and allow the radiation therapists to move you as necessary. Once you are positioned correctly you will be required to keep still until the treatment is completed.

The radiation therapists must leave the room during treatment; however, they will monitor you on cameras from outside the room. There is also an intercom system, so if you were to need assistance you can call out.

Imaging devices will be used to ensure you are in the right position before the treatment can be delivered. The direction of the beam is set by moving the machine and the couch, on which you will be resting, to the correct position. At times during your treatment we will take images and occasionally adjustments to the couch will be made before continuing with the treatment.

The time you spend in the department can vary for each individual depending on the area being treated and the treatment preparation that you may be required to undertake. Depending on your beam arrangement you will spend approximately 20 minutes in the treatment room but the actual prescribed daily dose of radiation is only a few minutes. During treatment you will not see or feel anything. You will just hear a buzzing sound and that will let you know that the machine is delivering the treatment.

Waikato Regional Cancer Centre is a teaching hospital and at times we have students in our department. If you don't wish to have students involved with your treatment, please advise a member of staff.

For more information please refer to:
<http://www.waikatodhb.health.nz/radiationoncology/>

Effects of treatment

At the time of your treatment a radiation therapist will discuss your treatment plan, including potential side effects, skin care and how long you will be in the department for. This is a chance for you to ask any questions. It might be a good idea to write these down in the back of this book.

Radiation therapy is a localised treatment, so most side effects vary depending on the body site being treated. Everyone is affected differently by radiation therapy and the severity of side effects varies from person to person. If you experience any of the following side effects, please notify a member of staff.

Potential side effects include but are not limited to:

Early side effects (can occur days to weeks starting radiation therapy treatment)	Late side effects if bone treated (may occur months or years after radiation therapy treatment)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fatigue (tiredness)• Skin reddening/irritation• Pain flares (temporary increase in pain)• Nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weakening of the bone (radio necrosis)

The peak of any reactions/side effects you may experience may not occur until approximately 7-14 days after the completion of your radiation treatment.

If you have any concerns or experience any side effects please speak to the radiation therapists and where necessary they can organise for a nurse or oncologist to see you.

Wellbeing

Mental wellness

The diagnosis of cancer and undergoing treatment can add additional stress to your life. Anxiety and depression are common among patients during and following cancer treatment. It is perfectly normal to feel emotional about the journey you are going through and everyone deals with the situation differently. You may find it helpful to talk to family and friends about how you are feeling or if you would like professional and psychosocial support please mention this to a radiation therapist.

Diet and weight

It is recommended that you have a well-balanced diet. Adapt your diet to suit your needs and eat smaller meals more frequently. If at any time you are having difficulty eating or drinking, or you are suffering from a loss of appetite, please inform a member of the treatment team.

Other referrals

If needed you may be referred to other services to aid with your treatment journey if appropriate. These could include community hospice, hospital palliative care team, dietitian, district nurse or occupational therapy.

Follow-up

At the completion of your treatment, a follow-up appointment will be arranged with your radiation oncologist or one of the oncology nurses. Sometimes a phone call appointment is advised. If you do not know what follow-up has been arranged, please ask one of the treatment team. You may be requested to have further tests or scans done at the request of your radiation oncologist.

If you have any questions or concerns between the end of your radiotherapy treatment and your follow up appointment, you can contact your GP or one of the numbers below.

Useful numbers

- Waikato Hospital Switchboard 07 839 8899
- Blue Machine ext: 98073
- Green Machine ext: 98249
- Pink Machine ext: 98221
- Yellow Machine ext: 96191
- Oncology Outpatient Reception 07 839 8604
- The Cancer Society's Lions Lodge 07 834 2351
- Cancer Society - Hamilton 07 838 2027
- Cancer Society Information Helpline Staff 0800 226 237
- Wilson Parking 07 839 8901

For more information on Radiation Therapy please visit:

<http://www.waikatodhb.health.nz/about-us/a-z-of-services/cancer-services/radiation-onology/>

<https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/>

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