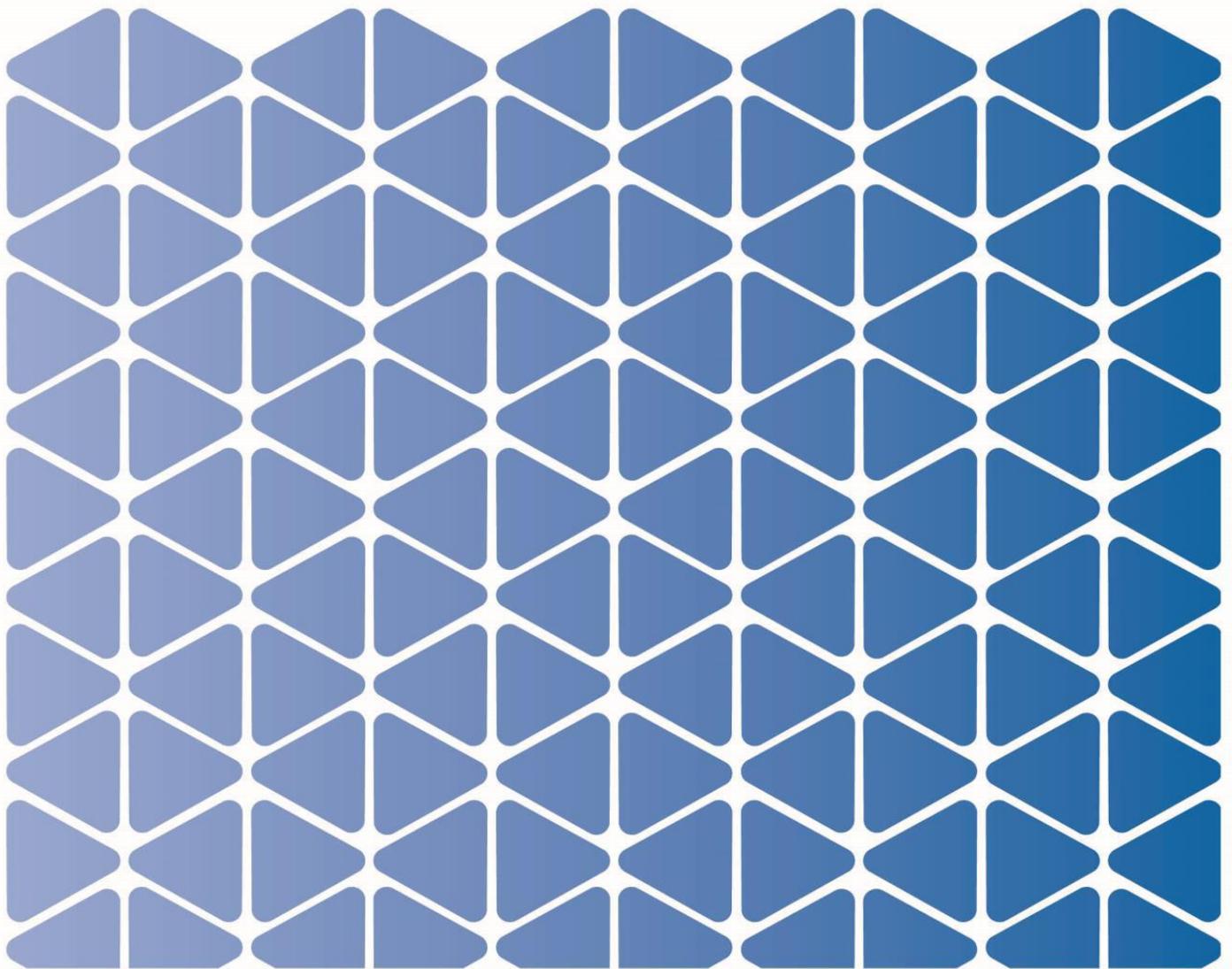




PATIENT INFORMATION

**RADIOTHERAPY TO THE  
BLADDER: SIDE EFFECT  
INFORMATION**





## Worcestershire Oncology Centre

Improving cancer services in Worcestershire

### Introduction

This leaflet will explain possible side effects which may develop when receiving radiotherapy to your pelvic area.

These effects are individual and can vary from person to person. Most effects are temporary. Acute (early) side effects may start at varying times during treatment and disappear in the weeks after treatment finishes. Late side effects may not occur for a long time after the treatment has finished.

The radiographers will explain your possible side effects in more detail and answer any questions you may have before you start treatment.

You may also be having chemotherapy treatment at the same time as your radiotherapy. Chemotherapy is the treatment of cancer with drugs. **You will be given specific written information and consented separately for this.** You will have weekly blood counts while you are having chemo radiotherapy treatment.

For each treatment appointment we would like you to have an empty bladder. So we ask you not to drink one hour before your appointment and then you will be asked to empty your bladder **immediately** before you are called in for your daily radiotherapy treatment.

### Acute (early) side effects.

*These can occur whilst you are undergoing radiotherapy and in the weeks immediately afterwards. They tend to be cumulative so may not occur in the first week.*

### Effects on the bladder (cystitis)

You may experience an increase in frequency and urgency of urination and some people develop a burning or stinging sensation as well. There is also the possibility of feeling the urge to pass urine but then only passing small amounts. Some people also experience passing blood and debris.

You can help yourself by

- Drinking plenty of fluids and keeping well hydrated. This will depend on weight and body size but the average amount is 1.5-2 litres (3-4 pints) per day.
- Avoid drinks that can irritate the bladder such as tea, coffee, green tea, alcohol, fizzy drinks such as cola and fresh juices. Herb/fruit or caffeine free drinks are fine.

Please tell the radiographers if you think you may be developing urinary symptoms. **If at any time you feel you cannot pass urine at all you should seek urgent medical advice through your GP.**

### **Effects on the bowel**

You will probably find that your bowel motions become more frequent over time with looser stools and possibly diarrhoea. It is not uncommon to have increased wind and pass some mucous or blood in your stools. You may also experience a bloated and tender feeling in your stomach.

You can help yourself by

- Trying to eat your usual diet and avoid missing meals.

If necessary we will advise you of a change of diet or medication. If you experience a loss of appetite or are struggling to eat, we will refer you to our dietitian. If you are having chemotherapy as well, these side effects may be more severe.

### **Tiredness**

It is not uncommon to feel tired as you go through radiotherapy treatment. It can be a combination of travelling to and from hospital and coping with the side effects of treatment. Research suggests that gentle exercise and keeping active can help with the symptoms of tiredness and fatigue. Macmillan Cancer Support has a lot of information available. Please ask your radiographers for the appropriate booklets.

### **Hair loss**

You may find that you will lose pubic hair in the area that is being treated. It will grow back but may be thinner.

### **Skin**

It is unlikely that you will experience much of a skin reaction in the treatment area.

Please speak to your treatment radiographers and they will advise you if you have any concerns.

## **Nausea and weight loss**

Some people may find they lose weight while having treatment. This can be due to the side effects such as diarrhoea, nausea, loss appetite and tiredness.

Let the radiographers know if you are experiencing any of these as they will be able to give you advice and get medication to help with the sickness and/or diarrhoea. It will also be possible to refer you to our dietitian.

## **Other**

During treatment you are **not** radioactive. Once the machine is switched off there is no radiation present so you are safe to be around children and pregnant women.

## **Late side effects**

*These may occur months to years after you have completed your treatment. Modern machines and techniques have reduced some of these late effects.*

**Bladder changes** – can include a need to pass urine more frequently and urgently, reduced bladder capacity and occasionally blood in the urine

**Bowel changes** – rarely there can be narrowing or bleeding from the bowel

**Impotence** – radiotherapy can cause impotence in 30-40% of men occurring up to 2-5 years after treatment

**Infertility** - radiotherapy to the bladder can result in lowered sperm counts in men, and early menopause in women. This is because the bladder is close to the reproductive organs. If you are concerned about infertility talk to your consultant before your treatment begins

**In women**, radiotherapy can cause a narrowing and shortening of the vagina, which may make sexual intercourse uncomfortable or difficult. It may also cause some vaginal dryness but lubricants are available on prescription. To help prevent this happening you may be recommended to use a vaginal dilator with some lubricant jelly. These will be given to you during your radiotherapy. They are used to maintain the opening of the vagina, and can help to make future clinical examinations more comfortable for you.

There is a **very small risk** of second cancers developing in adjacent areas in the years following your radiotherapy treatment

Please discuss any new symptoms that you experience after your treatment, with your consultant in the follow up clinic.

## **After treatment**

The early side effects from the treatment will continue for several weeks after the treatment course has been completed.

If you develop new symptoms after your treatment is over, or you are concerned that the immediate side effects are not clearing up, you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist Radiographer on 01905 761420 or the Acute Oncology Service on 01905 760158

There is often a simple explanation for these symptoms and they do not necessarily mean you will develop the late effects of treatment. You may also contact your GP or your Clinical Nurse Specialist.

**If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.**

### **Patient Experience**

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

### **Feedback**

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

### **How to contact PALS:**

**Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: [wah-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:wah-tr.PET@nhs.net)**

### **Opening times:**

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.