

Three large, teal-colored arcs of varying radii are positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping each other.

# External beam radiotherapy (EBRT) to secondary bone cancer

Radiotherapy

A guide for patients and carers

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This information is for patients who are going to receive EBRT (radiotherapy given from outside the body) to secondary bone cancer for symptom relief. You are not made radioactive as a result of the treatment and following treatment you are safe to mix with others including children and pregnant women. If you have any questions before starting your treatment, please contact the Information and Support Radiographer at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre, Monday to Friday (9am -5pm) on **0151 556 5314**.

## What is secondary bone cancer?

Secondary bone cancer develops when cancer cells, which have arisen from another part of the body (known as the primary cancer), develop and grow in the bones. This causes changes in the bone resulting in pain and/or swelling. There may be a risk of the bone breaking (fracture).

Occasionally, the diagnosis of cancer is made unexpectedly following the investigation of persistent bone pain or fracture.

## The aim of treatment

The aim of your treatment is to relieve your symptoms, i.e. relieve pain and to slow down the activity of the cancer in the treated area. The disease can weaken the bone, so radiotherapy is also given to try to prevent fractures. When the risk of fracture is high, you are likely to be considered for surgery which involves placing metal pins or plates into the bone to strengthen it. Radiotherapy is often given a few weeks afterwards.

The number of treatments you need depends upon a number of factors, e.g. which part of the body needs treatment and the size of the area. It is common to treat secondary bone cancer with one treatment, known as a single session. Sometimes, 5 or 10 treatment sessions, known as a course, or fractionated radiotherapy, are used. Your doctor will explain how many treatments you will need and what side effects to expect.

## What to expect when you attend

You may find it useful to read our booklet called 'Radiotherapy'. If you use walking aids, wheelchairs etc. bring them with you, if possible, when you attend. When you arrive, if you require assistance or need a wheelchair, please ask at the reception desk in the front entrance.

The first appointment is at the pre-treatment department, called Planning, at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral. The exact area to be treated is defined and measured by taking images using a CT scanner. This is a simple and painless procedure and you should breathe normally throughout. We will draw some marks onto your skin. The staff will ask your permission to make a permanent mark by the use of small tattoos. For the majority of people, the planning procedure takes 10-15 minutes.

Following an assessment of your needs and the technical details of the treatment, we will confirm the date you will start your



radiotherapy. The majority of people will start radiotherapy a few days later. We will give you a printed list of appointments.

Those starting the same day should expect to be at the hospital for a few hours, so please bring any medication with you. We have pagers that you can use while you wait which allow you to go to other areas, e.g. coffee shops or outside. You should eat and drink normally before you attend and while you are waiting. If you live locally and have brought yourself for the appointment, rather than using hospital transport, you can choose to go home and return later in the day, if you wish.

Following assessment, some people may be able to have their treatment at our other site, Clatterbridge Cancer Centre – Aintree.

## Possible side effects of treatment

Listed below are the most frequently occurring side effects; some are dependent upon the area of the body treated. We will discuss possible side effects again when you attend. Frequently, we give you extra medicines to help with these effects though this may not be necessary, depending upon which medicines you may already be taking.

- Within the first 24 hours or so, you may notice an increase in pain (often called a flare of pain) in the treated area, particularly if you have a single treatment. It would be wise to rest as much as possible during this time. During this time, if any pain is not under control with your usual medicines, you should contact your GP, District or Macmillan Nurse or contact the **Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline 0800 169 5555**

- Following single session radiotherapy, you may feel unwell (have flu-like symptoms and feel sickly/nausea) for a day or two afterwards. Again, it would be wise to plan to rest as much as possible during this time
- Following a single treatment, it is possible to have a mild or no skin reaction. Having fractionated treatment increases the chance of having a more marked skin reaction (the skin may become dry, pink and tender). It will settle a few weeks after treatment; meanwhile wash and dry the area gently
- Fatigue is a common problem with secondary bone cancer and for many, following radiotherapy, it may be more troublesome for a short time
- When treating the bones within the abdomen or pelvic areas, you may notice that your bowel motions become more frequent and loose for a short time. This occurs because we cannot avoid any bowel which lies in front of/close to the bone(s) receiving treatment
- Radiotherapy to the pelvic bones can sometimes include treating some of the bladder, which may cause temporary symptoms, e.g. the need to pass urine more frequently and discomfort. Drink more fluid until the symptoms settle
- When the back bones (spine) of your chest or neck area are treated, it is possible that your gullet/throat will become a little sore for a short time. These structures lie in front of the spine and so receive some radiation dose. If this soreness is troublesome, painkillers may be helpful as well as eating softer foods until it settles



## When to expect improvement in symptoms

Following treatment, most people get full or partial relief of symptoms. You may notice the start of the change about 10 days after your radiotherapy is complete. A noticeable improvement may occur after a few more weeks, though for some it may take many weeks to notice a marked improvement.

## After treatment

Most people will get a follow-up appointment with their Oncology doctor. If you are taking medication for pain relief, your doctor will discuss ways of reducing it, if appropriate. If you have a Macmillan/District Nurse or GP attending to you, they may already have started this process.

If you develop persistent pain or discomfort in any other areas, mention it to your health care team.

Depending upon the response to treatment, and any handicap caused by the disease, you may want to consider the following:

- Use of a walking aid or wheelchair. Discuss this with your GP, who can refer you for an assessment. The Red Cross society can also provide wheelchairs on loan
- Applying for a Disability Car Badge (Blue Badge). Contact your local council, who will advise you on the process

## Financial support

If you have secondary bone cancer, you may be entitled to certain disability benefits, e.g. Personal Independence Payment, if you are under 65 or Attendance Allowance, if you are over 65. We have a Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service, who can give advice regarding entitlement to ensure that you do not miss out on financial support. Please ask a health care professional looking after you to make the referral on your behalf. There are other sources of benefits advice, e.g. Macmillan Cancer Support Benefit telephone helpline on **0808 808 0000**, your local Citizens Advice Bureau, local council advice service or other advice agency. It is important to apply for benefits as soon as possible, as entitlement usually only starts from the date of claim.

## Other support

Macmillan booklets about coping and living with cancer and treatment side effects are available free of charge. These can be ordered by telephoning 0808 808 0000 or by visiting a Macmillan Cancer Information & Support Centre (located in the main entrance at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral and Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Aintree).





Some people and their carers find support groups are helpful; contact the Macmillan Information Centre for details.

Alternatively, if you are familiar with using the internet, the major cancer charities often have online communities.

## Useful contact numbers

### **The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust**

[www.clatterbridgecc.nhs.uk](http://www.clatterbridgecc.nhs.uk)

0151 556 5000

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

0808 808 0000

### **Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre at:**

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral 0151 556 5570

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Aintree 0151 556 5959

### **Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline 0800 169 5555**

If you are unwell during, or up to six weeks following your cancer treatment, please call The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline. Your call will be answered by a dedicated nurse advisor. This line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

# Notes

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## How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

**If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.**

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