



The Clatterbridge  
Cancer Centre  
NHS Foundation Trust

# You and your PICC line

Nursing



A guide for patients and carers

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**This information is for patients who want or need to have a PICC (Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter) line inserted.**

**The leaflet will explain:**

- **What a PICC line is**
- **Why you need a PICC line**
- **How a PICC line is inserted**
- **How to care for your PICC line**
- **What to be aware of when you have a PICC line**
- **Potential complications from a PICC line**

## What is a PICC line?

A PICC line is a long, thin flexible tube, known as a catheter, which is inserted into one of the large veins in your upper arm. This catheter is then threaded through your veins until the tip sits in the large vein just above the heart. Generally, the PICC lines that are inserted at the hospital are single tube (lumen) lines but other types are available. A PICC line can remain in place for many months while you are receiving your treatment. If you need any further information about a PICC line, please contact the team on: 0151 556 5737 Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm.

## Why is a PICC line necessary?

### **PICC lines are inserted for several reasons:**

- Chemotherapy regimes that require you to have a portable pump
- Small veins that are difficult to access repeatedly for the administration of intravenous (IV) chemotherapy or other IV drugs
- Patients who are extremely anxious about needles
- Patients whose veins have become painful and more difficult to access due to chemotherapy
- PICC lines can be used to take blood samples

You may eat and drink normally the day you are having a PICC line.

## How a PICC line is inserted

A specially trained nurse will insert your PICC line and will explain the procedure fully to you. The nurse will assess the deeper veins in your upper arm using an ultrasound machine to select the most suitable. Local anaesthetics are available and will be used to make the procedure more comfortable.

You will be required to lie quite flat for approximately 30 minutes and will be asked to position your arm at an angle away from the



body to assist with the positioning of the line. This helps make the insertion of the PICC more successful.

The nurse placing the PICC will wear a surgical hat, mask and gown and prepare their work area carefully to ensure that the procedure is carried out as safely as possible.

Once the PICC line has been placed successfully, the nurse will secure the line by using a small device called a Securacath. This will remain on the line until it is removed and will help reduce the likelihood of the line being pulled out accidentally, and clear dressings. A bandage may be used over the site for a couple of hours. This bandage can then be removed by the patient later the same day, leaving the other dressings in place. The PICC line will often need to be redressed within 24-48 hours of the placement as often the insertion site can bleed. This can be done by a district nurse, by visiting the PICC team's dressing clinic or at one of the chemotherapy units. This dressing change can be delayed until your treatment, by using a small antimicrobial sponge (Biopatch) around the PICC to reduce infection risks.

Specialist equipment similar to normal Electrocardiography (ECG - a heart rhythm recording machine) can be used during the placement of the PICC to help the nurse locate the tip of the line. Three small stickers that are connected to the equipment will be placed at certain points on the body. When the nurse is confident that the line position is correct, the area is cleaned and the patient may then go home or onto their next appointment. Occasionally, it will be necessary to obtain a chest X-ray to confirm the position of the PICC.

Occasionally, it may be difficult to thread the PICC along the vein of choice or to place the line into the correct position, making the procedure unsuccessful. Other choices will be discussed, if this happens.



An image of a PICC line prepared for use





An image of a PICC line when not in use at home

## How to care for your PICC line

Whilst you have a PICC line, it is vital that anyone who handles the PICC or redresses the site has a good standard of hand hygiene by washing their hands with antibacterial soap/gel first and by using a sterile method during all actions taken with the PICC or at the exit site. It is important that your PICC exit site remains completely covered at all times, even when being used and when at home; the entire line is covered and secured comfortably when not in use, to reduce infection risks.

The PICC line needs to be cleaned, redressed and flushed with saline once a week by trained staff from The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre or by district nurses to prevent the line becoming blocked. It is essential to keep the line clean and dry at all times, so when taking a bath or shower it helps to wrap the area in "cling film" to keep the area water tight. There are commercial products that can be bought which are available from large chemists, shops or the internet, please discuss options with the nurses who are placing your PICC for useful suggestions. You can lead a normal life with a PICC line in place, but there are some things that should be avoided. Swimming is not possible, and heavy work or certain sports may need to be adapted. A PICC line should not be removed automatically to allow for a holiday overseas. Please discuss this with the PICC team who will be able to offer advice . If you have any concerns, please contact the triage nurse via The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline, telephone number 0800 169 5555. The nurses caring for your PICC line will document their actions in your hand held PICC records that will be given to you when your line has been placed successfully. These records should be taken when your line is being used so that they can be updated regularly, or if you attend any other clinical setting, so that staff can be made aware of your line details. We strongly advise you to ask staff to use these records as they are a valuable resource for other areas.

When your line is no longer required, it will be removed by either your chemotherapy nurse, the PICC team or, sometimes, your district nurse. This is a simple procedure and the PICC team must be informed that the line has been removed.



## Complications that can occur

- PICC line sites can become infected, please report any pain, redness or oozing from the site immediately to the triage nurse via The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline. Please check your temperature, if feeling unwell, and report any temperature above 37.5°C
- Blood clots can develop in the vein along route where the PICC line is sitting, please report any swelling to your arm or neck or pain immediately to the triage nurse via The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline. If you develop a clot, you will start specific treatment. It is not necessary to remove your line if this occurs
- Rarely, PICC lines can break or leak. Should you notice any damage or leakage from your line, contact the triage nurse at the Centre immediately
- The line can come out from the correct position if it has not been possible to use a Securacath device on your line, this will be obvious when the nurse documents the exit length in your hand held PICC document. Please inform the Centre if you believe the line has moved
- Occasionally, the PICC line can stop giving blood back. Do not worry if this happens, as one of your nurses will administer a solution into the line that will help resolve this problem

- Sometimes, during the first 72 hours, your arm can ache after having a PICC line placed. Try placing warm compresses on your arm or shoulder to help ease this, particularly within the first 24-72 hours and simple analgesia may help. If worried, do not hesitate to contact the triage nurse for further advice

## Contact Telephone Numbers

If you need to speak to one of the interventional nurses for advice or guidance relating to your PICC line, please call the **Interventional Team on 0151 556 5737 - Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.**

Outside of these hours please contact the **Clatterbridge Cancer Centre Hotline on 0800 169 5555.** Your call will be answered by a dedicated nurse advisor. This line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



## Further information

A guide for patients attending The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust provides more information about the Trust or visit the Macmillan Cancer Information Centre located in the main entrance of Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral.

## Testimonials from patients who have had a PICC line – provided with their permission

"I didn't want to have a permanent line put in my arm, but when my veins were so sore, I thought more about my veins than I thought about the chemotherapy, so I reluctantly agreed. It was the best decision I made, I loved the idea of no more needles."

"I relaxed the minute the line was placed, I enjoyed the contact with staff every week for my dressings, and never worried about giving my blood as it was always a couple of goes each time."

"I hated having the line in all the time, but I must admit it is the best idea for having chemotherapy as I came in, got hooked up with no needles and worry. Thank goodness."

## 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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