

Radiotherapy

(Introductory Booklet from the Radiotherapy Dept at
Carcassonne Hospital)



Freely translated, with the consent of the Centre Hospitalier de
Carcassonne,

by: **Cancer Support France – Sud de France**

Aude, Ariège, Pyrénées-Orientales, Tarn

For our contact details, please see the back page

Supporting all those whose lives have been touched by cancer

This document is translated from the Livret d'Accueil produced by the Service de Radiothérapie of the Centre Hospitalier at Carcassonne. It attempts to use everyday English rather than direct translation, while hoping to remain faithful to the meaning of the original French. Some of the French terms are shown in bracketed italics, to help you recognise them.

Carcassonne Hospital - Radiotherapy **Department**

(known as **Radiation Therapy** in the USA & some other countries)

Introductory Booklet

This introductory booklet is designed to give you the information you need to understand your treatment and answer any questions puzzling you.

The team will do everything to provide you with the quality of care you expect.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions not covered in this leaflet.

The entire team of doctors and staff is at your service.

Useful numbers:

Reception (*Secrétariat*): 04 68 24 29 65

Nurses (*manipulatrices*): 04 68 24 29 69 / 04 68 24 30 10

This booklet is based on the information booklet drawn up by the SFRO and SNRO (*two organisations concerned with radiology*) together with the Ligue contre le Cancer (*League against Cancer*).

THE DEPARTMENT

The Radiotherapy department (*le service de radiothérapie*) is open from Monday to Friday, from 8 am to 6 pm.

The radiotherapy team is made up of the following health specialists:

Radiotherapy doctors (or Radiotherapists, known in the USA & some other countries as Radiation Oncologists) (*médecins radiothérapeutes*): These are doctors specialised in treatment using ionising radiation. They decide on the treatment, select the dosage to be administered and determine the area to be treated. A doctor will check up on you regularly during and after treatment.

Physicists (*physiciens*): These are specialists in the physics of the radiation therapies used in hospitals; they choose, together with the doctor, the exact procedures for your treatment. They calculate the treatment time, the right balance between the prescribed doses and check daily on the quality of care.

Dosimetrists (*dosimétristes*): They are in charge of planning the treatment sessions. They undertake the clinical dosimetry (ie. dose calculation and distribution) in accordance with the doctor's instructions.

Technicians (*techniciens en physique*): They do quality checks on the different machines used in radiotherapy treatment.

Hospital managers (*cadres de santé*): They are responsible for supervising the nurses. They organise, co-ordinate and monitor the care given to patients. They safeguard the quality of care.

Radiotherapy nurses (*manipulateurs*): They take care of you during your treatment, provide you with information and reassure you. Together with the doctor, they decide on the area to be treated. They administer the treatment prescribed by the doctor in the manner determined by him. They prepare you and set up the equipment used in radiotherapy. They ensure that the areas to be treated have been properly identified and check that you do not have any abnormal reactions. They are there for you and provide the link to the doctor.

Medical secretaries (*secrétaires médicales*): They organise the appointments and take overall care of your file.

Psychologist (*psychologue*): Mme Belmonte-Lorion is available by appointment every afternoon. To book an appointment, leave a message on her answerphone: 04 68 24 26 39.

Beautician (*esthéticienne*): Mme Lacroix is available by appointment for foot and face massages, facial care, body care, hair removal, make-up and manicure. To book an appointment, call 04 68 24 23 77.

WHAT IS RADIOTHERAPY?

Radiotherapy is a treatment using ionising rays. Its purpose is to destroy tumour cells, which are more susceptible to radiation than normal cell tissue.

Radiotherapy is a very effective treatment for cancer.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT PROCEDURE?

First doctor's appointment (*première consultation médicale*): Before your first appointment the radiotherapy doctor will discuss your case with his colleagues, for example during meetings involving different specialists. He will suggest the most appropriate treatment for your case and will explain to you each of the stages which follow the appointment. He will ask you to designate a support person. The next appointment will be the scanner simulation.

First-contact nurse's appointment (*consultation d'annonce paramédicale*):

This will be with one of the radiology nurses. It takes place after your first doctor's appointment and at the same time as the dosimetric scanner session. It is for all patients admitted by the department, but also for their close friends and family. This appointment focuses on what you know and have understood about your radiotherapy treatment. It allows you to ask any questions about the treatment planned.

Dosimetric simulation / scanner (*simulation / scanner dosimétrique*): This process identifies very precisely the area of your body which needs to be treated. It is done with a machine called a scanner, which produces 3-dimensional images, so as to target the appropriate radiotherapy.

You need to lie down and remain still throughout the whole simulation, which lasts 30 minutes to an hour. During this process marks with felt tip or small tattoo dots are made. These marks are very important, since they act as guidance points for the nurses when they set up the treatment equipment.

In some cases the nurse may make a mask or heat-shaped mould to help you maintain the right position during each session.

It may also be necessary to repeat this process during the course of the treatment in order to adjust the treatment procedure.

Dosimetry (*dosimétrie*): The data from the scanner simulation are analysed by computer. At this stage the doctor, assisted by the dosimetrist and the physicist, uses the information from the simulation to determine the treatment suited to your case. The physicist then finalises the details of your treatment and calculates the treatment time. The duration of treatment can be between one day and eight weeks.

Procedure during a treatment session: It is normal to feel nervous before the first treatment session. The nurse will ask you to undress in a cubicle, but wear a sarong, dressing gown or towel to protect your modesty. She will then take you to the treatment room and ask you to get onto the bed in the position and with the aids prescribed during the planning of your treatment.

Your radiotherapy team is there to answer any questions. The treatment equipment is quite bulky and can be noisy as it works and moves around you. Do not forget that the nurses are constantly checking that all is functioning as planned. The treatment session itself lasts a few minutes and is painless.

When everything is ready, the nurses leave the room, but observe you on a CCTV screen and remain in contact with you over an intercom.

It is essential that, throughout the whole session, you remain still and in the position you are asked to take.

The first treatment day is generally used for a final check of the area to be treated, employing portal images (comparing each section with those identified

in the dosimetry session) and an OBI (On-Board Imaging apparatus - a system of conventional imaging, coupled to a particle accelerator, to enable daily re-positioning). The second treatment day is used for live dosimetry (measuring the dose during the treatment session).

IMRT: This is a radiotherapy technique using Intensity Modulation. This advanced technique enables the delivery of a dose as close as possible to the dimensions of the tumour which it is targeting, while avoiding the healthy tissue nearby. The idea is to be able to raise the level of the dose because the tumour is more accurately targeted. Secondary effects on the nearby organs are thus reduced.

Respiratory Gating (*Le Gating*): This is a breath-free radiotherapy technique, ie. one avoids the motion of breathing by treating a patient holding his breath. The patient is asked to fill his lungs and hold his breath, monitored by a spirometer, while in the pre-determined area is targeted with the aid of video glasses.

TREATMENT LOGISTICS

Timing (*Horaires*): The time of the treatment appointment will take your preferences into account as far as possible. It is important to keep it. Despite best efforts it is possible that you may be asked to wait longer than usual at short notice: this may be caused by adjusting the equipment, emergencies or simply a bit more time needed to listen to your questions. The team will do all it can to organise your treatment as efficiently as possible.

Transport: Normally radiotherapy does not require hospitalisation. However, this may become necessary if your treatment takes place far from your home and you are having chemotherapy at the same time or your condition requires it. You will be told of the most appropriate means of transport. You can use your own car or be driven on any day of the week by an authorised taxi (*taxi agréé*), light health vehicle (*VSL*) or ambulance. The means of transport chosen will depend on your state of health and the medical prescription. The cost will be refunded by your health insurance body (*caisse d'assurance maladie*).

MONITORING (*Suivi*)

During treatment: you will have a weekly update with your radiotherapist. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions bothering you and he will be able to answer your queries. The nurses may also join him at any stage in the treatment, if required.

On completion of treatment: Your radiotherapist will make a clinical examination to ascertain the effect of the radiation treatment.

Regular check-ups: Your radiotherapist, in consultation with your GP (*médecin traitant*) and other specialists, will see you regularly to assess your condition and so monitor the stages of improvement. Any ill effects, should you have them,

will wear off in the weeks immediately following your treatment. It is normal for you to continue to feel tired: this will gradually disappear.

SIDE EFFECTS (*Effets indésirables*)

As with all treatments, radiotherapy can lead to side effects. They vary from one patient to another and depend on the area treated and the level of dose. Many patients feel little or no ill effects.

Do not hesitate to mention any to the nurses or radiotherapy doctor, who are best placed to answer your queries during treatment.

External radiotherapy sessions are not radioactive, so no precautions need to be taken in mixing with people following treatment.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Should I stop working? If you are not tired, you can continue your job, since the sessions last only a few minutes each day and are fitted around your commitments. It is also possible to ask your employer to adapt your working hours or let you work part-time.

Can I take a break in treatment? This is not a good idea and can only be done if your doctor agrees.

Can I go on holiday? Yes, once the radiotherapy is finished. Your GP (*médecin traitant*) or the cancer specialist will advise you of the precautions to be taken on holiday.

What can I wear? Dress as normally as possible. However, over areas where you skin has been treated, it is better to wear light and full but sturdy clothing, such as cotton.

Why must I wait so long for my treatment to start? In certain cases and especially after a surgical operation, it is necessary to wait before starting treatment so that scars can heal properly. Also, it may take a while to prepare the treatment.

Why do I feel tired? During your treatment, your body uses up a lot of energy. Also, the stress linked to your illness and the treatment adds to your fatigue. The feelings of tiredness and weakness will gradually disappear after your treatment has finished. In order to reduce this tiredness, try to ask less effort from your body, do things more slowly and rest during your free time. Try to sleep longer at night and take a siesta, if you can. Look for the least tiring way of travelling between your home and the treatment centre.

Should I follow a particular diet or avoid certain foods? You should have as complete and balanced a diet as possible. However, in certain cases and

depending on the area of your body being treated, you may be asked to adjust your eating habits.

Can I avoid skin problems? You should wash in warm water with unscented pH-neutral soap. It is advisable to wear cotton clothing and preferable to apply nothing to the treated area, even cream or perfume. If necessary, the radiotherapist will prescribe something suitable for your skin. Protect your skin from sunlight.

What can I do about losing my appetite? Try to eat in small amounts, several times a day, and follow your appetite. The radiotherapist will prescribe any necessary medicine.

Finally, do not hesitate to contact our Department's medical or paramedical staff.

September 2013.

CANCER SUPPORT FRANCE - SUD DE FRANCE

Aude, Ariège, Pyrénées-Orientales, Tarn

Telephone Helpline: **04 68 69 01 37**

E-mail: helplinecsfsud@gmail.com

Association no: W 112000594



Local website: www.csf-suddefrance.webs.com

Forum: csf-forum.org

National website: www.cancersupportfrance.org