Brachytherapy is a type of internal radiation therapy. We will tell you what it is and how to prepare for it. Please underline anything you do not understand. Also, write down any questions you have. When you come for a visit bring this handout and your questions. Your health care team will answer your questions.

**What is Brachytherapy?**
This delivers a high dose of radiation to a small area within the uterus, cervix, or vagina. Small, hollow tubes are placed by your doctor. A tiny, radioactive source, attached to a wire, is inserted through the tubes. The wire is left in place for a short time, most often 5-20 minutes. The wire then moves out of the tube and goes back into its storage case. The doctor takes out the tubes and the treatment is complete.

This is done in the Radiation Oncology Department. Most patients have 5 treatments and are scheduled 1-2 times per week. Each treatment takes 6-8 hours from start to finish. This is a surgical procedure. It is done under anesthesia. Anesthesia is given by doctors and nurses. You will fall deeply asleep and remain comfortable.

**What do Brachytherapy instruments look like?**
The drawing below shows some of the commonly used instruments. It also shows where they are placed in the body. They vary in size and shape. Your doctor will choose the ones that are right for you.
How do I get ready for Brachytherapy?
Getting ready for the first treatment requires a number of tasks. These tasks are done in a pre-procedure visit that takes 2-4 hours.

- You will have a complete medical history and physical exam from the radiation doctor.
- Your current medicines must be reviewed. The review includes the names, doses, and number of times you take them per day.
- Some patients need lab work, an ECG, or a chest x-ray.
- You may also visit the Pre-procedure Assessment Safe Service (PASS) Clinic. Here, your records are reviewed to prepare for the anesthesia. You will be asked about any prior events with anesthesia.
- Please note, patients who get anesthesia are not allowed to drive for 24 hours. **On the day of your procedure, a friend or family member will need to drive you home. For your safety, someone (age 16 or older) needs to stay with you today and tonight. You should not drive or make important decisions until the next day.**
- You will be called 2 days prior to your procedure with your pre-op instructions and time of arrival.

What happens on the day of the Brachytherapy treatment?
Do not eat or drink anything after midnight. If you do eat or drink something after midnight, your treatment may be canceled. This is for your safety. **Follow medicine instructions that you were given at your pre-operative history and physical appointment.**

Please plan ahead.
- First Day Surgery Unit, enter through the hospital, not clinic, door. Follow the gray stone path to the D elevator. Take the D elevator to the 3rd floor. Turn left to the First Day Surgery Unit door.
- Bring your parking stub with you.

In First Day Surgery, you will change into a hospital gown. The nurses will take your blood pressure, pulse and may check your blood sugar level. They will insert a small intravenous (IV) needle into a vein in your hand or arm. This IV will be used for medicines and fluids. Shortly before your treatment is scheduled to begin, patient escort will bring you down to the Radiation Oncology department. You will be on a cart. A member of the anesthesia team and your radiation doctor will talk to you. You may be asked to walk into the treatment room. You will be asked to lie down on a narrow treatment table. We will help you with this if it is hard for you. The anesthesia team will give you medicines to put you to sleep. Once you are deeply asleep, the radiation doctor will get you ready for the brachytherapy treatment.
The Brachytherapy Treatment

1. Loose cotton stockings will be put on your legs to keep them warm. Compression leggings that inflate and deflate will also be put on your lower legs. These are used to help blood flow. During the treatment, you will lie on your back. Your legs will be put up into leg rests.

2. The radiation doctor will do a pelvic exam. Your skin will be cleaned with a special soap. A small tube (Foley catheter) will be put into your bladder to collect urine. This tube is removed before you go home. The instruments used for the brachytherapy are put into place by the radiation doctor. The placement is checked with ultrasound. When an ultrasound is done, a cool gel is put on your lower belly. This helps the doctor see your inner body parts. You will go either to the CT or View-Ray scanner in our clinic or the MR scanner in the Radiology clinic. The CT, View-Ray or MR scans are used to make sure the instruments are in the right places. This helps plan for your radiation treatment. You will be asleep for the entire CT, View-Ray or MR scan.

3. After the CT, View-Ray or MR images are done, the radiation treatment is planned. This is done by the medical physicist. He or she uses a prescription from the radiation doctor. A computer software program is used to plan the treatment. It is checked and approved by the radiation doctor.

4. The radiation that is used comes from a tiny piece of radioactive matter. This is about the size of a piece of pencil lead. It is attached to a wire and kept inside a lead-lined storage box.

5. The radiation doctor connects one end of the thin hollow cables to the storage box. The other ends of the cables are attached to the ends of the brachytherapy instruments. During the treatment, the radioactive matter moves out of the storage box and into the brachytherapy instruments. It stays there until the prescribed dose of radiation is given (about 5 – 20 minutes)

6. After the radiation dose has been given, the radioactive matter returns to the storage box. It does not remain in your body. The treatment part of the procedure is now over. All of the instruments are removed. Your legs are lowered back onto the table. You are “brought out of” the anesthesia. You are moved to the post-anesthesia care unit and checked for about an hour. After you are more awake, you are moved to the discharge unit. This total recovery period can last from 2-3 hours.

7. Once you are fully awake, you will be given something drink. Family members or friends can visit. You will be prepared for discharge. The radiation doctor may wish to talk to you and answer any questions you may have. You may remember bits and pieces of the procedure, or you may remember nothing at all. Because of the medicine given for anesthesia, you should not drive, drink alcohol, use dangerous equipment, or make any major decisions for 24 hours.
What can I expect after Brachytherapy?

1. You may have some minor vaginal bleeding or discharge for the first 24 hours. It should not be more than a normal menstrual period. We can provide you with a sanitary pad or you can bring one from home; **DO NOT** use tampons.

2. Please do not douche during the time you are getting treatments. Doucheing can disrupt the body’s natural chemical balance.

3. You may have some vaginal cramping (similar to menstrual cramps) after the procedure. This should stop by the end of the day. Ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin® IB) or naproxen (Naprosyn® or Aleve®) may help. Take it according to the directions on the bottle.

4. You may have some irritation or burning when you urinate. This can be related to the catheter that was put in. You should drink 8-12 glasses of fluids each day for the next 1-2 days. Let us know if these symptoms do not go away.

5. Your memory of the treatment may be fuzzy. This is a short-term side effect of the anesthesia medicines.

6. After your treatment, you may resume your normal diet.

7. You are **not** radioactive after this treatment.

8. You will be given a vaginal dilator or vibrator at one of your visits. How it is used will be explained to you. You will need to use it because the brachytherapy treatments cause the vagina to narrow and shorten. Your health care team will tell you how long you will need to use it.

9. It is safe to have sex between treatments.

10. Call the Radiotherapy doctor at **(608) 263-8500** for any of these symptoms.
    - Fever above 100°F.
    - Pain that is not relieved with medicine.
    - Bleeding more than a normal menstrual period.
    - Burning with urination or blood in the urine lasting more than 24 hours.

Your radiation doctor is _____________________________ Phone Number ________________

Or call______________________ at___________ for any questions or concerns.