Vaginal Brachytherapy Treatment

This handout explains what will happen during your radiation treatment to the vagina. If you have any questions, please speak with your doctor or nurse.

What Is Brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is a method of giving radiation to a small area. This involves the placement of one or two small hollow tubes inside the vagina. These tubes are called applicators. A radioactive source will travel into the applicator from a storage unit through thin cables. It will remain in the vaginal applicators for 3-15 minutes, until the correct amount of radiation is given. Your doctor prescribes the dose of radiation you receive.

The treatment is given in Radiotherapy. Most patients will have three to five treatments with one or two treatments each week. Each treatment takes about one hour. Some patients will have this treatment while getting daily external radiation treatments. Only one type of treatment, internal or external, is given per day.

What Do the Applicators Look Like?

The applicators vary in size and shape. Your doctor will choose the one that fits you best. Below is a drawing of the applicators most often used. The drawing also shows where they are placed.
Before the Procedure

If you take prescription medicines you may take them as usual. You may eat your normal diet, but avoid eating a large heavy meal before the treatment. You will be lying flat on your back for about an hour.

Arrive at the hospital about 15 minutes before your scheduled treatment. Park in the main hospital ramp and bring your parking card in with you. Check in at the Clinics Registration desk on Main Street (2nd Floor). You may have your parking card stamped so you will not need to pay for parking when you leave. The person at this desk can also tell you how to get to Radiotherapy. It is in module K4 in the basement (K4/B).

When you are in the department, please check in at the Radiotherapy reception desk and then have a seat in the main waiting room. This is where your family or friends can wait for you during your treatment. A member of the staff will take you to the treatment room.

Before the treatment, you will be asked to change into a gown. You will need to remove all clothing from your waist to your feet. You may wish to bring sandals or slippers to keep your feet warm. We have a small stereo in the room for your use. You may also bring in your own music, such as an iPod to help you relax during the treatment.

Vaginal Radiation Procedure

1. **Exam and placement of the applicator.** This part takes about 10-15 minutes.

   Fabric stockings will be placed for comfort and warmth. During the treatment you will lie on your back with your legs up in knee rests. You will remain like this until the treatment is over. The doctors first will perform a pelvic exam to decide the size and shape of applicator to use.

   The proper applicator is placed inside the vagina. This may cause some pressure inside the vagina, but should not cause pain. If you have problems with pelvic exams (severe pain or anxiety), please tell your doctor or nurse before the day of the treatment.

2. **The radiation treatment.** This part takes about 5-20 minutes.

   Before the treatment starts, cables from the treatment machine will be attached to the applicator. During the treatment, the radioactive source will slide inside the applicator and stay there for the proper amount of time. You will not feel the treatment as it is given. You may hear a clicking or humming noise from the treatment machine. You will be alone in the room during the treatment, but we will be able to see and hear you. We can also talk to you through a speaker. After the treatment is finished, the applicator will be removed, the area cleaned. You will be shown back to the changing room. Once you have finished changing you may leave. Other than no driving if you took a sedative, there are no other restrictions.

What to Expect after the Treatment

1. Some very light vaginal bleeding, spotting or discharge is normal. This should stop within a day or two.

2. You may have some burning or irritation when you first urinate after the treatment. Drink 8-10 glasses of fluid (water is preferred) each day for the next 1-2 days.
3. You may have mild diarrhea. This may be due to irritation to the rectum from the radiation or anxiety from the treatment.

4. You may feel tired after the treatment if you took a medicine for relaxation. This is a short-acting side effect of the muscle relaxant.

5. You are not radioactive after the treatment, only during the treatment. There are no restrictions for you being around other people or pets.

6. You will be given a vaginal dilator or vibrator, during one of your treatment visits. You will need to use this at home to prevent the vagina from getting tight and narrow. You will receive a handout about this and your doctor or nurse will teach you how to use it.

7. It is safe to have intercourse between treatments; unless, your surgeon has told you not to do so until you are fully healed. Please follow your surgeon’s guidelines, which are based upon your healing and length of time since surgery.

8. Call your Radiotherapy doctor at (608) 263-8500 for any of the symptoms listed below.

- Fever above 100°F
- Abdominal pain
- Burning with urination or blood in the urine lasting more than 24 hours

Follow-Up Visit

Your doctor will tell you when he or she would like you to return for a follow-up visit. Often, it is one to two months after your last treatment.

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment, please be sure to talk with us. You may talk with your Radiotherapy doctor or a member of the health care team by calling (608) 263-8500. If you call when the clinic is closed, your call will be forwarded to the answering service. Ask for the Radiotherapy doctor on call. Give the operator your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back. If you live out of the area, please call 1-800-323-8942.

Your Doctor is __________________________ Phone Number __________________________