

## Frequently Asked Questions and Linear Accelerators in Radiation Oncology

We understand that radiation therapy can be confusing or overwhelming. This handout contains a list of questions that many patients have asked in the past. We hope this information will help you understand what will happen during your treatment.

### **When will I get the results of my CT scan from today?**

The CT scan that you had today was for treatment planning only. Doctors or therapists will not be able to use this scan to see changes in your tumor.

### **When will my first radiation therapy treatment appointment be?**

After your CT scan, your treatment plan will be made. You do not have to be present for the planning session. The radiation therapist from your treatment machine will call you in a week or two to set up your first treatment. The therapists will try their best to work with your scheduling needs.

### **How will I know where my treatment will be?**

The therapist who calls you will tell you which machine will be used for your treatment. You will be given directions to that machine.

### **Where do I check-in?**

When you start coming in for treatments, you will not need to check-in at the main registration desk. You may come straight down to radiation oncology and check-in at your treatment machine with a radiation therapist.

### **When will I see my doctor or nurse?**

During treatment, your doctor and nurse will see you on a regular basis. They will follow your progress, assess any side effects, and address any concerns you may have. You will see your doctor once weekly. Of course, concerns may come up on days that you will not see your doctor. If this happens, please let your therapists know. They can answer your questions or refer you to someone else who may help you.

### **Can I feel the radiation?**

You will not feel the radiation. You can hear the machine turn on and make a buzzing sound.

### **Who else will be a part of my treatment team?**

- **Radiation Therapists** work with doctors to give the daily treatment. They are under the doctor's prescription and supervision. They maintain daily records. They regularly check the treatment machines to make sure they are working properly.
- **Dosimetrists** carefully calculate the dose of radiation to make sure the tumor gets enough radiation. Using computers, they work with the doctor and the medical physicist to create a treatment plan.
- **Medical Physicists** work directly with the doctor during treatment planning and delivery. They direct the work of the dosimetrists. They help ensure that treatments are proper for each patient.

**Will radiation make me sick?**

You may have side effects from your radiation treatment. The side effects are based on the area of your body treated. For example, patients being treated to their abdomen or pelvis may feel nauseous. Ask your therapists what side effects you may have. Feeling tired during radiation treatment is a common side effect that many patients have. Skin reactions from the radiation are also common. You will receive more information once you begin treatment.

**Will I lose my hair?**

If you are being treated to your head or any part of the body covered with hair, there is a chance that you could lose your hair in that area. Based on the dose of radiation that you receive, hair loss can be permanent or temporary.

**When will I see side effects from the radiation?**

As a rule, about 2 weeks after the start of your treatment side effects may begin. Your therapist will provide you with information once you start treatment.

**Will I be radioactive?**

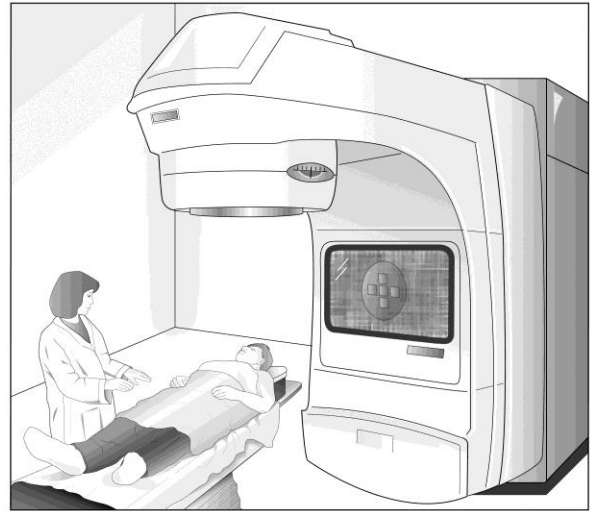
No. The only time there is radiation is when the machine is turned on. You are safe to be around others because you are not giving off radiation.

**What happens if I can't make it to one of my radiation therapy treatments?**

Please call the treatment machine on which you are being treated. Speak with a therapist. It is advised that you do not miss any of your treatments. If you do need to cancel an appointment, another day will be added on to your treatment schedule to make up for the missed day.

**How can I contact my doctor before I start treatment or in-between treatments?**

You may call our department at **(608) 263-8500** to speak with your doctor or a nurse.



Linear Accelerators are commonly referred to as “linacs.” The first treatment is typically 30 to 45 minute visit. The treatments after are usually 15-30 minutes long. You will see your doctor once a week. The doctor will monitor your side effects and address any other concerns. In most cases, the visit with your doctor is after one of your treatments. You will not need to make a separate appointment to see your doctor each week. The therapist will set you up with that each time. You should plan on being in the clinic a little longer on those days.

**What is a Linac?**

A linac is a machine that is designed to deliver high-energy x-rays to treat certain diseases, most commonly cancer. The machine can rotate around you while you are on the treatment table.

### **What happens during a treatment visit?**

Please arrive for your treatment in Radiation Oncology at the time you were given. Check in at the reception desk in Radiation Oncology before your treatment. Then have a seat in the waiting room by your treatment machine.

- You will be called into the room, and the therapist will explain the process in detail.
- You may be asked to remove some clothing or personal items during the treatment.
- The table will move up and in towards the treatment machine. There are positioning lasers in the treatment room that the therapists will use to align you on the table. This is to put you in the correct treatment position. The therapists will use the tattoos or marks that you were given at the CT to line you up.
- On the first day of treatment the radiation therapists will use an imager on the machine to take x-rays. Sometimes the machine moves while it is taking the x-rays. These x-rays will confirm that you are in the correct position for treatment. Therapists may make adjustments to your position before starting treatment. Your radiation doctor will be called to the treatment unit to see the images and make sure everything is as planned.
- After the first day, the treatment itself will just take a few minutes, but you may be in the treatment room for about 15-30 minutes total for set-up and treatment.
- When the treatment is finished, the therapists will come into the room and help you off the table.
- There is no pain or discomfort with treatments. You will not see, feel, or hear the radiation. You will hear some background noise from the machine. The therapists will watch you with TV cameras and can hear you at all times. If at any time you need something, wave your hand or call out loudly. The therapist will stop the machine right away and come into the room.
- Side effects of treatment depend on what part of your body is treated. Your doctor will discuss these with you.
- Treatments are given Monday-Friday. If you need to reach the staff you may call your treatment machine Monday through Friday between 8:00 and 4:00.
  - **Room A: (608) 263-8503**
  - **Room D: (608) 890-5288**
  - **East Clinic: (608) 504-4180**
- In your last week of treatment, you will meet with your doctor. A follow-up visit will be made at this time if necessary.
- If you have any questions or problems once you are home, call the Radiation Oncology Clinic at **(608) 263-8500**. If the clinic is closed, the hospital answering service will pick up the call. Ask for the radiation oncology doctor on call. Give your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2017 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7229