

# HDR Brachytherapy for Gynecological Cancers (Standard Outpatient Procedure)

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## What is High Dose Rate (HDR) Brachytherapy?

- Brachytherapy (pronounced brack-ee-ther-a-pee) is a form of radiation treatment. An applicator is inserted into the vagina. A radioactive source is then put into the applicator. This allows the radiation dose to be given to the treatment area and lessens the dose to areas of the body that are close. This is called HDR brachytherapy.
- You may need more than one treatment. Your radiation oncologist will decide how many treatments you will need and when they will be scheduled.
- You will be given medicine to put you to sleep for the treatment called anaesthesia.

## How to Prepare for Your Treatment

- Take your regular daily medicines at the usual times unless you are told otherwise.
- Do not have anything to eat or drink after midnight.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol for 24 hours before your treatment.
- Nursing staff will be give you instructions on bowel prep to be done the night before your procedure.
- You will need someone to drive you home from your appointment and stay with you that night.

## What will happen on the day of treatment

- The procedure takes place in the Brachytherapy Unit at the QEII Cancer Centre.
- You will need to register at the Radiation Therapy reception desk at the appointment time given to you.
- Bring your health card.
- Bring all of your medicines, in their original containers.
- Instructions for eating, drinking and taking medications before surgery will be given to you by the anaesthesia team. It is important to follow these instructions closely.

## What happens during the treatment

- The procedure should take about 2 hours.
- There will be several staff in the room.
- You will lie down on a special table.
- An IV will be started in your arm. The IV will be used to give you the medicine and fluids you need during the procedure.
- You will be connected to a heart, blood pressure and oxygen monitor.
- Once you are asleep, your legs will be placed in stirrups for support.
- Your vaginal area will be cleaned with a cool brown soap. A catheter (soft tube) will be put in your bladder to drain urine.

- The radiation oncologist will put the treatment applicator into position in your vagina.
- The radiation therapist will take x-rays that will be used to plan your treatment.
- You may be woken up or left asleep for the treatment.
- When the treatment plan is ready, the radiation therapist will connect a plastic tube to the treatment applicator in your vagina. The radiation source will move from a special machine through the tube and into the applicator to deliver the treatment.
- During the treatment, the team will leave the room. Your team will be able to see and hear you during treatment. The team can stop the treatment at any time if you need help.
- You will not feel anything during your treatment.
- Your treatment will last 15-30 minutes. After the treatment is done, the radiation therapist will remove the tube. The radiation oncologist will remove the applicator and catheter.

**Most patients do not require admission for this procedure but if you are admitted:**

- The catheter and applicator will remain in place. They will be removed when you are ready to go home.
- You will lay flat on your back or side; you can have a pillow under your legs or between your knees, but you cannot raise the head of the bed more than 30 degrees.
- The nurse will check your pain and give your pain medication as needed.
- If you are having 2 treatments in one day; one will be in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

**After the Procedure**

- You will be taken to a special recovery area, where the nurses will continue to monitor you.
- The nurses will check your level of pain and give you pain medicine as needed.
- You will stay connected to the monitors so that the nurses will check your:
  - › Blood pressure and pulse
  - › Breathing
  - › IV
- The nurses will look for any bleeding or discharge from the vagina.
- You will spend 1-2 hours in the recovery room.
- When you are ready to go home, the IV will be removed.
- You may feel tired or drowsy for a few hours. Rest as much as you can.
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours.
- Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Do not sign any legal documents or important papers for 24 hours.

## **Special Instructions**

- When you are ready to go home, instructions about your care at home will be reviewed with you.
- You should avoid sexual activity once you start your brachytherapy treatments. You may return to sexual activity 2 weeks after your brachytherapy treatments are finished. If you are having pain or signs of an infection, continue to avoid sexual activity and contact your radiation therapy team.
- Your oncology nurse will review the vaginal dilation process with you and let you know when to start.
- If you are having 2 or more treatments, you will be given an appointment for the next treatment before you go home. Each treatment follows the same steps.
- After your last treatment, we will give you a follow up appointment.

**Patient and family feedback is very important to us.**

**We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to [education.cancercare@nshealth.ca](mailto:education.cancercare@nshealth.ca) or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.**

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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*If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.*