

# Brachytherapy for Treating Cancer

## Brachytherapy

Brachytherapy is a form of radiation treatments that attacks cancer cells. It can be done by standard low dose rate (LDR) or high dose rate (HDR) techniques. Your radiation oncologist will tell you which he or she recommends for you.

Brachytherapy lets the radiation oncologist and medical physicist tailor the radiation therapy to the specific tumor area. This reduces the amount of radiation exposure to surrounding tissue.

Most HDR brachytherapy treatments are given as outpatient procedures. Treatments are usually given in three to six sessions. The first treatment period usually lasts the longest because your doctor and physicist need more time to complete your treatment dose plan on a computer.

You may need to have brachytherapy alone or you may need to have it with external beam radiation treatments.

## Before the Procedure

- You may need to have a Smit Sleeve or a type of catheter placed before your treatment begins. Your doctor will talk with you about this, if necessary.

## During the Procedure

- A registered nurse will be with you during the procedure.

- You may have an intravenous (IV) line started in your hand or arm. You may receive pain medicine through the IV to help relieve discomfort.
- You may receive medicine to help you relax. You will take it by mouth or it will be given through your intravenous (IV) line.
- If you receive IV pain medicine, you will need to have someone drive you home.
- A nursing assistant will help you get into position for the treatment.
- You may need to have a catheter placed in your bladder.
- Brachytherapy provides radiation in carefully controlled amounts.
  - The radiation oncologist puts applicators inside your body where the treatment area is located.
  - The medical physicist puts imaging markers inside the applicators.
- X-rays will be taken.
- The brachytherapy machine holding the radioactive material is wheeled near you. Connecting tubes are attached to the applicators.
- During the treatment, the staff members leave the room. They will watch you with a TV camera and monitor system. The radio-active source is moved into the tubing and then the applicators then back into the brachytherapy machine. This process is known as afterloading.

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## After the Procedure

- The radiation oncologist will remove the applicators.
- The nurse will remove the catheter or IV.
- The nurse will give you written and verbal discharge (follow-up) instructions.

If you have any questions or problems, please call the Department of Radiation Oncology at 612-863-4060. Regular business hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

After hours, you may leave a message or you will be given instructions if you need to speak with a radiation oncologist.