Last reviewed: 01/08/2024

Reviewed by: Clinical and patient reviewers

Next review date: 01/08/2027

The following content contains images and descriptions of cancer treatment that some people may find upsetting or triggering. Please follow the guidance of your clinical team for information specific to your situation. Some medical terms may not translate accurately when using translation tools.

Introduction to your treatment team

Your radiotherapy team has different professionals doing different jobs, each with a unique role. Everyone in the team works together to deliver your treatment.

You will get to know some members of your team, while others contribute behind the scenes. The time between your first planning appointment and treatment appointments is used to plan your treatment in detail.

Your team will include:

Clinical oncologists

Therapeutic radiographers

Medical Physicists

Dosimetrists

Clinical engineers

Clinical Technologists

Clinical Nurse Specialists

Student and Apprentice Therapeutic Radiographers

More information about each role is available below.

There are many other professionals that are involved in your diagnosis and treatment. These include radiologists, pathologists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, palliative care teams, pain specialists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and many more. These professionals all play a very important part in caring for you but are not part of your radiotherapy team.

Clinical Oncologists

These are specially trained doctors in cancer treatment. They will help you decide the best treatment plan for your diagnosis. They will guide you through the options: considering your medical history and personal circumstances.

You should then be able to make an informed decision about your treatment.

Watch this video to learn more about informed consent:

https://youtu.be/shkArFBXFqY

If you are offered radiotherapy and decide to have it, your clinical oncologist will refer you to the radiotherapy department. This referral will begin the process of ‘planning out’ the treatment.

Clinical oncologists decide the treatment plan along with dosimetrists. The treatment plan is designed by the dosimetrist on a special computer using the scans taken at your planning appointment. They will consider:

Your medical history

Where the cancer is or the target

Any sensitive structures nearby

Clinical oncologists will approve the treatment plan before it is used.

Clinical oncologists and therapeutic radiographers will monitor you through your treatment. They can offer support and advice when needed. They might refer you to other healthcare specialists who can help you.

After treatment, your clinical oncologists might book a follow up appointment with you. They will see how you are and talk through future management for your diagnosis.

Therapeutic Radiographers

Therapeutic radiographers are the only healthcare professionals specifically trained to scan, plan and deliver your radiotherapy treatments. They also provide supportive care for people having radiotherapy.

VIDEO: A Therapeutic Radiographer answers your questions:

https://radiotherapy.org.uk/patients-families/video-a-therapeutic-radiographer-answers-your-questions

They have in-depth training in radiotherapy treatment and its effect on your body. With your clinical oncologists, dosimetrists and medical physics team they deliver your personalised radiotherapy treatment plan. Therapeutic radiographers operate the equipment needed to check, assess and deliver radiotherapy treatment accurately and safely. They carry out safety checks on the equipment each day.

Therapeutic radiographers will see and assess you each day of your treatment. This is to make sure you are well enough to continue. You will often be treated by the same small team throughout. They should welcome any questions or concerns you may have.

Therapeutic radiographers often do further study to specialise in different areas. They can then become consultant radiographers. They can review patients in clinics, prescribe approved drugs and plan prescribed treatments. Therapeutic radiographers can also be present in primary care settings, like your GP surgery, where they can help you with longer term and late side effects as a result of cancer treatment. They also work in research and clinical trials, developing treatments of the future.

When you have treatment, you may be asked if student therapeutic radiographers can watch and assist. This is an important part of their training and they will be fully supervised.

Medical physics team

Medical physics team members generally work behind the scenes to provide the scientific know-how for your treatment. They help plan complex treatments, ensure the machines deliver the right dose very accurately to the area you need treated and advise on new equipment. They also take part in research to develop new techniques and treatments.

They can prepare and apply brachytherapy (internal radiation) sources and calculate the treatment dose being delivered. They regularly test all the radiotherapy equipment by carrying out safety checks. Some manage specialised computing systems within the department; and write and maintain software.

The Medical Physics team is made up of a range of roles.

Clinical Scientists provide specialist advice to the clinical oncologist for complex or unusual cases. They also set up new equipment and make sure it is safe and ready for use. They commission and test the development of new treatment techniques.

Radiation protection experts make sure that radiation safety measures are working. They give radiation safety advice to staff and the public. They also make sure the radiotherapy department follows safety regulations. These are usually clinical scientists.

Dosimetrists design and produce radiotherapy treatment plans. Each patient has a personalised plan using their CT and/or MRI scans. The dosimetrists place the radiation fields on the scans and modify them to get the best treatment outcome. Every patient has their very own plan produced and that plan is reviewed and checked, which is why there can be a wait between the first planning scan and start of treatment.

Clinical Technologists look after the very complicated equipment involved in treatment. You may meet them during your treatment. Many are very involved in bringing in new technology that improves outcomes for patients. Clinical technologists make sure equipment is working safely and accurately.

Clinical Engineers provide specialised engineering services and technical knowledge. They are part of the team that repair and maintain the complex equipment that is involved in the whole of the treatment pathway. They design, develop, support and manage medical devices used within the radiotherapy pathway. Engineers keep the machines working and have to be able to fix lots of different things. The machines are very complicated with many safety systems. Clinical engineers make sure that the machines are regularly serviced and set to very high specifications. The engineers make sure any breakdowns are dealt with quickly and safely ensuring there is as little disruption to the patients as possible.

Clinical Nurse Specialists

Any form of cancer treatment can have a physical and emotional impact. Clinical nurse specialists (and Therapeutic Radiographers – see above) are there to support you and your carers throughout treatment. Some treatment centres in the UK have radiotherapy nurses, who take on a similar role to clinical nurse specialists.

This might include:

looking at your overall health

helping you and your family navigate through complex medical systems

educating you about your treatment

helping you manage and control symptoms

advocating for your wellbeing

Clinical nurse specialists have a good understanding of general health and cancer medicine. They also have lots of knowledge of radiotherapy side effects and management.

They will be able to answer many questions and provide physical and psychological support.