

The Christie at Salford

Stereotactic Ablative Body Radiotherapy (SABR) to the spine

Introduction

This information is for patients who are going to receive stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) to their spine. Please read this leaflet alongside The Christie booklet 'Radiotherapy - a guide for patients and their carers'.

This leaflet will explain:

- what SABR is and what the benefits of this treatment are
- general information about the planning of your treatment
- general information about what happens on the day of your treatment
- general information about side effects of treatment
- who to contact when you need advice

What is SABR and what are the benefits of this treatment?

SABR to the spine involves the precise delivery of high dose radiotherapy. SABR is given over fewer treatment sessions than conventional/standard radiotherapy which may increase the chances of controlling the tumour at the treatment site and reducing pain more effectively than standard radiotherapy.

The planning of your treatment

You will be required to attend **The Christie at Salford** to have a planning CT scan. The scans which are undertaken to plan your radiotherapy are solely aimed to give enough information to plan the radiotherapy accurately. These scans are not diagnostic and therefore do not give sufficient information to assess the status of your cancer or any other abnormalities.

At this appointment the radiographers will make a mask of your head and neck for you to wear during the treatment planning scans and treatment. This mask helps ensure you are as still as possible for the scans and treatment. During this planning session the radiographers will draw some marks on the area being treated with a skin pen. These marks wash off and so we would like to give you some permanent marks (pin size tattoos) on your skin in order for us to reproduce your position during the treatment planning scans and treatment.

You will be required to attend **The Christie at Withington** to have a planning MRI scan. For this scan you will need to be positioned as you were for your planning CT scan including wearing your mask.

Please bring your regular medication with you. It may be beneficial to take painkillers 30 minutes before each session if you have pain.



When will I start treatment?

Treatment will usually start within a few weeks after your planning visits. You will be given a list of treatment appointments when you attend for your CT planning scan.

Consent

We will ask you to sign a consent form agreeing to accept the treatment that you are being offered. The basis of the agreement is that you have had The Christie's written description of the proposed treatment and that you have been given an opportunity to discuss any concerns. You are entitled to request a second opinion from another doctor who specialises in treating this cancer. You can ask your own consultant or your GP to refer you. Your consent may be withdrawn at any time before or during this treatment. Should you decide to withdraw your consent then a member of your treating team will discuss the possible consequences with you.

What happens on the day of your treatment?

You will be required to attend **The Christie at Salford** to have your treatment. You will need to be positioned as you were for your planning CT scan including wearing your mask. Treatment is normally given over 3 or 5 treatments, on alternate days.

A team of radiographers, physicists and clinicians work together in the treatment rooms, and you may hear them sharing information and giving instructions relating to your treatment.

A scan of the area you are having treated will be taken before, after and sometimes during each treatment. These scans are purely to check that you are in the correct position and not to check how the tumour is responding to treatment.

You will be alone in the radiotherapy treatment room while the machine moves around you and delivers treatment. You will not feel the treatment, and nothing will come into contact with you during the treatment process. A closed-circuit television on the control desk gives the radiographers a clear view of you and they will be watching you all the time.

It is important that you stay as still as possible during the treatment process. The treatment is normally given from a number of different directions (beams) depending on your individual treatment plan. Treatment can take between 30 and 60 minutes.

Side effects of treatment

Side effects from SABR to the spine can vary between people dependent on what area has been treated. Your SABR consultant will discuss with you which of the following side effects apply to you and how likely they are to occur.

- **Tiredness (fatigue)** - you will feel more tired than usual for several weeks after the radiotherapy has been completed.
- **Skin reactions** - the skin where you are having the radiotherapy may change. Skin reactions can vary, but the common symptoms are redness, dryness and itchiness. Very rarely, the skin may break down.
- **Difficulty swallowing** - if you are having your upper spine treated, you may experience difficulty swallowing or swelling in your mouth which can be painful.
- **Pain** - there is a risk that any pain you have may increase for a few weeks immediately following treatment. Occasionally the bones being treated can be damaged, which may need non-surgical or surgical treatment.
- **Breathing problems** - you may develop a cough, have difficulty breathing and notice an increase in the amount of phlegm you have.
- **Changes in bowel habits** - if you are having your pelvis treated, you may experience some changes in your bowel habits such as diarrhoea.

- **Temporary or permanent damage to the spinal cord:** this is rare. However, it can result in altered skin sensations, such as burning, prickling, itching or tingling; muscle weakness causing inability to walk (paralysis); decreased ability or loss of ability to move a body part or to hold urine or control a bowel movement.

If you experience any of these side effects, it is important you discuss them with the team treating you.

Follow-up

You will be seen by your SABR consultant between 4 - 6 weeks after your SABR treatment has finished. After this, you may not routinely see your SABR consultant, but may continue with follow-up appointments with your referring doctor.

Contact details

- Specialist radiographers **0161 918 7825**

- Via your consultant's secretary
 - Dr R Colaco **0161 918 7197**
 - Dr J Wylie **0161 446 3344**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week