**Part 1: Understanding Radiation Therapy**

**“What is radiation therapy?”**

Radiation therapy aims to destroy or damage cancer cells so they cannot multiply; interrupting their growth and relieving symptoms associated with cancer such as pain.

There are two ways it can be delivered depending on your cancer type. External beam radiation therapy is where a machine delivers rays or beams from outside the body to target the cells requiring treatment. Internal radiation therapy (or brachytherapy) is when radioactive material is placed within your body, inside or near the cancer.

Depending on your diagnosis, your treating team may prescribe radiation therapy alone, or use it in conjunction with surgery or chemotherapy. Treatment sessions can range from a one-off, to daily for several weeks.

**“Preparing for radiation therapy”**

Your treating team may arrange for you to have a CT scan to accurately plan the positioning of your radiation therapy. You may be asked to follow certain instructions to prepare for this scan and these will be communicated to you prior to this appointment time.

Alternative or complementary therapies can affect how your treatment works, so make sure to notify your doctor if you use any of the following:

* Vitamins and minerals
* Antioxidants
* Amino acids
* Herbal and botanical remedies
* Protein powder

Smoking, excessive alcohol intake and the use of recreational drugs can reduce the effectiveness of radiation therapy and are associated with more severe side effects, so it is recommended to limit their usage and to ask your treating team about the withdrawal supports available.

Treatment can affect your fertility, sexual function or a developing baby. These are important parts of life, so it’s important to discuss your future plans, questions and concerns with your treating team before commencing therapy.

**“On the day of treatment”**

If you are receiving external beam radiation therapy, it will not hurt. The staff will position you on the machine along with any stabilisation devices required and it is important that you hold completely still.

The lights will be dimmed and the staff will leave the room, but a camera and microphone will allow them to see and hear you, and for you to speak to them if you need.  The machine will then deliver invisible x-rays to your targeted site. You may hear a buzzing sound but you won’t see or smell the radiation.

If you are receiving internal radiation therapy (or brachytherapy) it can be somewhat uncomfortable during the device implantation, but this pain should not be severe and you should not feel ill.

Radiation therapy can be tiring, especially as the number of treatments go on. It can be helpful to bring someone along to your appointments, so they can drive you home afterwards and be with you for emotional support.