Treatment with a radioactive plaque

You have been given this leaflet about radioactive plaques because you have an eye tumour that can be treated with radiation.

This leaflet provides you with information about being treated with a radioactive plaque and explains what will happen once you have had the plaque inserted. It also includes a list of useful contact numbers and the details of an organisation you can get in touch with if you require extra practical information or emotional support.

What is a radioactive plaque?
A radioactive plaque is a small metal disc that is placed on to the surface of your eyeball over your tumour. The metal gives out radioactive energy. Most of this energy is directed inwards towards the tumour and does not penetrate more than a centimetre. This means there is no risk of radiation contaminating other parts of your body.

Plaques come in different sizes and you will be carefully fitted with one that is a suitable size to treat your tumour (most are about the size of a 10p coin).

Once the plaque is in position, calculations will be carried out to decide how long the plaque will need to stay in place to kill the tumour cells – this varies between two to seven days.

You will not feel the radiation and you will not be able to see or feel the plaque while it is in place. You will need another short operation to remove the plaque before you go home.

What are the risks of having a radioactive plaque?
This operation is usually very straightforward and the risks are small. As with all surgery, there is a small risk of bleeding and infection.

Sometimes an eye muscle may need to be moved in order to place the plaque correctly. This can cause you to have double vision after the plaque is removed. Usually this returns to normal within a few weeks but, very occasionally, you may need further treatment to correct it.

Long term side effects of radioactive plaque treatment include the development of cataract, loss of visual
field and loss of vision. These side effects may take years to occur. Your consultant will be able to advise you on the individual risk.

**Coming in for the operation**

Your procedure will be carried out at St Bartholomew’s or Moorfields Eye Hospital where you will stay on the ward for up to a week. You will be given your own ensuite room for radiation safety reasons.

We will ask you to sign a consent form before the operation and give you identity wristbands with a special radiation label. You will also meet an anaesthetist who will discuss your anaesthetic requirements. The operation will be carried out under general anaesthetic and takes about an hour.

**After the operation**

You will be taken back to your room after the operation. Upon waking, you may find your eye feels a little painful and sore, but this is usually easily treated with painkillers.

You will have a protective eye shield over your eye and underneath this, a gauze eye pad. The shield and pad will stay on your eye whilst the plaque is in place. A nurse will remove the eye pad four times a day to give you eye drops which reduce the risk of inflammation and infection.

Radioactive plaques give out radiation and although this is localised to your eye (and the levels are extremely low), it is necessary for you to follow these two instructions while the plaque is in place. This is for your safety and the safety of others, and to fulfill our legal requirements.

1. You must stay in your own room
2. If you need to leave your room to go to the toilet, have a bath etc., you must inform a member of the nursing staff.

**Leaving your room**

After you have asked permission to leave your room, the nurse will check your plaque is still in place by using a Geiger counter that gives off a small bleep when it detects radiation. When you return, the procedure will be repeated to make sure you have not lost the plaque.

Please do not:
- Flush the toilet or drain the bath water. This will only be done when the nursing staff has checked your plaque is still in place before you enter the room again.
- Chat to others on the ward or in the corridors – please return directly to your room.
- Have a shower

**Smoking**

The hospital operates a no smoking policy.

**Visitors**

You are allowed visitors but please remember there are radiation safety issues. The radiation energy given off by the plaque is extremely low.
However, visits from children and pregnant women are only permitted in exceptional circumstances and need special permission.

**Removal of the plaque**
The plaque will be removed under general anaesthetic at the appropriate time (usually after an inpatient stay of two to seven days). You will usually find your vision remains the same as before the operation, but it may be temporarily blurred due to the eye drops. After the plaque is removed from your eye there will be no radiation in your body and it is completely safe for you to be around others.

**Going home**
If the plaque has been taken out in the morning, you may be able to go home the same day. Please make sure someone accompanies you.

You will be given an eye pad to wear for the journey home and we advise that you leave this on for the rest of the day. You will also be given eye drops to take for a few weeks and instructions on how to use them.

Sometimes your eye can become sore a few days after you have returned home from hospital. This is normal and the drops will help. Your eye may look red for several weeks but this is also quite usual so do not worry.

You will be given a follow-up appointment for approximately a month later before you leave the hospital, or one will be sent to you in the post.

**When to seek advice**
If you have any problems or queries, the ocular oncology clinical nurse specialists are available to answer any questions and talk to you about your treatment. You can contact:
- Sinead Hanrahan
  Phone: 07711 765 371
- Nana Gyasi – Twum
  Phone: 07885 447 138

If they are not available to take your call, please leave a message and they will call back as soon as possible.

**Moorfields ocular oncology appointments:**
New/first appointments - tel. 020 7521 4648
Subsequent/follow-up appointments – tel. 020 7521 4639

**Moorfields ocular oncology secretaries:**
Tel. 020 7253 3411 ext. 4872 / 2267
Tel: 020 3465 5513

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Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
City Road, London EC1V 2PD
Phone: 020 7253 3411
www.moorfields.nhs.uk
Moorfields Direct telephone helpline
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday-Friday, 8.30am-9pm
Saturday, 9am-5pm
Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)
Phone: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325
Email: moorfields.pals@nhs.net
Moorfields’ PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks
Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs