Radiotherapy in regional NSW

Radiotherapy requires large, expensive machines called linear accelerators inside specially built rooms so not every hospital has them. In the North Coast NSW region the North Coast Cancer Institute was established to provide radiotherapy facilities in the area. The Base Hospitals at Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Lismore have radiotherapy centres.

North Coast Cancer Institute, Lismore Cancer Care and Haematology Unit officially opened in July 2010.

STAFF YOU MAY MEET

Radiation Oncologists – the doctors who prescribe your radiotherapy treatment.
Radiation Therapists – plan and deliver your radiotherapy, offering support and advice.
Radiation Oncology Nurses – oversee your wellbeing during treatment, offering support and advice.
Radiation Oncology Medical Physicists – ensure the treatment machines work correctly and ensure plans are accurate.
Cancer Care Coordinators – coordinate patient care and ensure patient access to the information and support services.
Dietitians – provide nutritional support and advice.
Social Workers – provide social and emotional support and assist with finding financial support.
Speech Pathologists – provide expert support and advice.
Reception staff – will assist you with appointments.

Contact details

North Coast Cancer Institute,
Lismore Cancer Care and Haematology Unit
Open Monday to Friday
8:00 to 4:30

www.nnswhlhd.health.nsw.gov.au


70 Hunter Street
Lismore NSW 2480
Correspondence address:
Locked Bag 11
Lismore Base Hospital
Lismore NSW 2480

Phone: 02 6620 2416
Fax: 02 6620 2355
Radiotherapy in Lismore

Your doctor has advised that you will benefit from a course of radiotherapy. Radiotherapy can be used to treat a number of diseases and is one of the main methods modern medicine has to combat cancer, along with chemotherapy and surgery. Not all cancer treatment methods are appropriate for all types of cancer and they are sometimes used in combination.

EXTERNAL BEAM RADIOTHERAPY
There are different types of radiotherapy and the treatment available at North Coast Cancer Institute is external beam radiotherapy using photons and electrons. These are very similar in nature to X-rays used in imaging. You are only exposed to radiation when the machine is switched on. The radiation is aimed precisely at the part of the body that requires treatment and the rest of you receives little or no radiation. You do not become radioactive as a result of the treatment.

PLANNING
A number of weeks may lapse between your simulation session and the start of your treatment. This allows us time to design and check your treatment plan. The Radiation Oncologist prescribes your treatment. Radiation Therapists design the customised plans and treatment course to suit your needs. They are also the staff who will perform the simulation and deliver the treatment each day.

SIMULATION
All patients are different in terms of shape and size so everybody's treatment is tailored for you as an individual. Two people can have slightly different treatments due to various factors relating to diagnosis. We will need you to attend for imaging scans on a CT and possibly a MRI scanner. These appointments can take up to a few hours and is called the Treatment Simulation. We may ask you to prepare for simulation by drinking water before the session.

We will need to know if you have a pacemaker, a defibrillator or any other implantable electronic device or if you think you may be pregnant.

Accuracy is all important in radiotherapy. To minimise side effects we will assist you to lie in exactly the same position each day for treatment. This position is decided at simulation. To help reproduce that position we may need to make 2-3 small permanent ink marks on your skin.

TREATMENT
A course of radiotherapy can take between 1-8 weeks. Department hours are routinely Mon-Fri, 8 am to 4.30 pm. You should discuss any needs you have regarding appointment times as soon as you know them, preferably at simulation. Your daily radiotherapy treatment is built around many checks and each day x-rays, scans and several measurements may be carried out to ensure accuracy and to adapt the treatment should anything change. The most important thing you can do to help accuracy is to keep still once we have moved you into position and throughout the treatment procedure. You will not feel anything when the radiation is delivered.

FOLLOW UP
After finishing radiotherapy your radiation oncologist will provide you with a follow up plan.

SIDE EFFECTS
For most patients modern radiotherapy techniques have reduced and even eliminated side effects from treatment. However, short term side effects are possible during the course of your treatment. We will explain to you the side effects you could expect. Radiotherapy is very precise and we would not expect side effects away from the part of the body we are treating, with the exception of tiredness. You will have scheduled appointments throughout your treatment with your radiation oncologist and weekly assessments by nursing staff. Each day you will be treated by radiation therapy staff and you should tell us if you require advice or assistance. Other support staff and allied health professionals such as social workers, dieticians, speech pathologists and physiotherapists are available.