

# **BREAST CANCER RADIOTHERAPY**

Monica (name changed) a 45 year old lady underwent breast conserving surgery for left breast cancer. Having completed her course of chemotherapy, she has been advised by her Specialist to have Radiotherapy to the Breast

## **What is Radiotherapy?**

Radiotherapy is one of the modalities of treating Breast cancer. It uses high energy X rays (radiation) in small doses to destroy cancer cells that may remain in and around the breast area after surgery.

## **Why is Radiotherapy given?**

Radiotherapy is recommended after any type of breast conserving Surgery to reduce the risk of cancer coming back in the same breast. It may also be given to the chest area after mastectomy and to the arm pit if some lymph nodes have been removed and are affected. Radiotherapy will not usually be given to the arm pit if all the lymph nodes have been removed, but is sometimes given to the lymph nodes above the collar bone.

## **When is Radiotherapy given?**

It is recommended that Radiotherapy treatment should ideally start within four weeks of surgery or chemotherapy. Treatment plans vary but generally the patient would need to go to the Hospital each day, five days a week, for three to six weeks.

## **What happens during treatment with Radiotherapy?**

Before starting Radiotherapy, the Radiotherapy Specialist should explain to the patient regarding the rationale of administering Radiotherapy. A planning session is done prior to the actual treatment that involves spending time lying in a simulator unit while measurements and X rays are taken.

## **What are the short term side effects of Radiotherapy?**

Everyone is different, but the common side effect of Radiotherapy is a skin reaction – perhaps redness or darkening of the skin, itching tenderness or soreness. Tiredness is another symptom that is commonly experienced by the patient towards the end of the course of the treatment. The feeling of fatigue is common and may possibly last a few months.

## **What are the long term side effects of Radiotherapy?**

In the long term, some women who have radiotherapy to the arm pit might develop Lymphoedema (swelling of the arm). Other problems can appear years later because of the effects of radiation on the nearby tissues, nerves or bones, although with modern treatment, it is rare.