

# Rapid Response Clinic

## Palliative Radiotherapy

A Guide for Patients & Caregivers

### WHAT IS RADIATION THERAPY?

Radiation therapy uses radiation to kill cancer cells, shrink tumors, and slow down or stop tumor growth. Some people with advanced cancer develop troubling symptoms. Radiation can often help to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life.

Radiation is produced by a machine called a linear accelerator. The energy used is much higher than with normal x-rays, but just like with an x-ray, you won't feel anything during treatment.



Radiation therapy is given only to a targeted area of the body. It is non-invasive, which means that nothing will go inside your body. Our goal is to help with symptoms while keeping the chance and seriousness of side effects as low as possible.

### WHAT IS THE RAPID RESPONSE CLINIC?



The Rapid Response Clinic at the London Regional Cancer Program is a service for patients with cancer-related symptoms who could benefit from quick access to radiation therapy. Most of the time we will book an appointment to see you within a week of receiving a referral from your doctor. We offer people a “fast track” to start radiation treatment. In many cases, you can even get started on the same day as your clinic appointment.

## WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT ON MY APPOINTMENT DAY?

The first step is meeting with the Rapid Response Team to discuss your symptoms and radiation treatment options. This appointment usually takes about an hour.

If radiation treatment is right for you, the second step is a CT Planning appointment. This is similar to a regular CT scan except that you will not be given an IV or asked to drink anything. We use this scan as a blueprint to create a custom treatment plan for you. This appointment usually happens shortly after you meet with the Rapid Response Team and usually takes about 30 minutes to an hour. After your scan, you will get an appointment time for your first treatment.



**If you start radiation treatment on the same day**, the third step is a waiting period of about 3-4 hours. During this time, we plan your treatment. This process takes a few hours because it involves several people and multiple quality checks. You are welcome to leave the Cancer Centre during this time if you choose.

**If you are not starting radiation treatment on the same day**, you can go home after CT Planning and return on the day of your first treatment.

The last step is receiving your treatment which usually takes 20-30 minutes. If you are having more than one treatment, you will be given a schedule for your remaining appointments.

## HOW CAN I PREPARE?

On the day of your appointment:

- Bring a complete list of all of your medications. Ask your pharmacist to print this for you.
- Bring everything that you will need throughout the day. This includes any medications you take and any assistive devices (cane, walker, etc.) that you use.
  - **If you are using pain medication, please bring it with you.**
- Some people bring a lunch or snack and a book/tablet because it can be a long day.

## WHAT SIDE EFFECTS CAN I EXPECT?

This depends upon the area of your body being treated and will be discussed when you meet the Rapid Response Team. The most common side effect is fatigue (tiredness).

Side effects are usually temporary and often disappear days to weeks after treatment. Long term effects are uncommon. Sometimes people are prescribed a supportive medication to help with discomfort during and/or after treatment.

Everyone will get written information about their treatment area and possible side effects, as well as advice on how to help manage them.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER MY RADIATION TREATMENT IS FINISHED?**

It usually takes 2-4 weeks to feel the full effect of radiation treatment. Some people may feel it sooner and for others it can take up to 6 weeks.

## **MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS**

After treatment, your family doctor or primary care provider will continue to manage your care. Occasionally, the Rapid Response Team will arrange a follow-up appointment or other tests as needed.

A record of your treatment will be shared with the doctor who referred you, as well as your family doctor (if they did not refer you). You will also be given information on how to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

## **I'M FROM OUT OF TOWN AND IT'S TOO FAR TO DRIVE BACK AND FORTH. WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?**

If you are having more than one treatment and prefer to stay in London, ask us about The Residence Inn and temporary accommodations.

## **I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS. CAN I CONTACT THE RAPID RESPONSE TEAM?**

Absolutely. If you have an upcoming appointment and have any questions about the Rapid Response Clinic, please call Melissa (Palliative Care Clinical Specialist Radiation Therapist) at 519-685-8500, extension 75337.

## **WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LRCP?**

If you would like more information, please visit:

<https://www.lhsc.on.ca/london-regional-cancer-program/about-london-regional-cancer-program>.