External Beam Radiotherapy for Prostate Cancer: What to Expect

Simulation
Simulation is done to plan your radiation treatment. First a special mold is made to keep your hips and legs still during treatment. Next special x-rays called simulation films and measurements are taken of the area to be treated. Permanent marks or tattoos are put on your skin. This helps make sure that the exact same area is treated each time. Finally, you will have a CT scan of your prostate. Do not urinate for 2-3 hours before the CT scan. This results in a larger bladder size which may decrease the amount of your bladder that is inside the high-dose region for radiotherapy. This may help you better deal with the short-term side effects of radiotherapy.

Once simulation is completed, a treatment plan is designed. You should be able to start treatments 1 to 2 weeks after your simulation appointment.

Treatment
Radiation treatments are given everyday, Monday through Friday, as an outpatient. Do not urinate for 2-3 hours before each treatment. Before or on the first day of treatment, you will have a blood test to check your blood counts and PSA level. Each week, x-ray films called “port films” are taken to check that the exact same area is being treated each day. Once a week you will see your doctor and/or nurse to check for side effects.

Short-term Side Effects
Possible side effects include:

- Having to urinate more often
- Discomfort when you urinate
- Loose bowel movements
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue

In most patients, these side effects will slowly go away after treatment ends.

Long-term Side Effects
A small number of men will still have bowel problems such as more frequent or loose bowel movements. Bleeding from the rectum may also occur. The risk of any serious side effect occurring is small with the current technology used for radiation therapy.

Impotence is a possible side effect of most treatments for prostate cancer including radiotherapy. It can start up to several months after treatment.

Urinary incontinence is not common.

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