

surgery when the plaque was implanted. In most cases, patients should feel well enough to leave the hospital within three to five hours after the surgery.

Care of the Eye After Discharge

Once the plaque has been removed, your eye will begin healing. You will be given some drops and ointments to use three to four times a day for at least the first three weeks after your discharge. You will also be given a bottle of soothing eye wash to rinse the eye and reduce any sticky accumulations. If your skin is sensitive to the tape needed for your eye patch, you might try a paper tape specially designed for people who have to change their dressings frequently. You should also plan to take patches home with you when you are discharged. All of these items can be obtained from your local pharmacy.

You may experience some lingering pain or discomfort. You may notice some aches in your facial muscles and bones in those areas immediately surrounding the affected eye. For instance, my eye was puffy and I experienced some aches for the first month and a half after surgery. Your eye may become tired more quickly than normal. A good night's rest is a good solution to this problem. Report anything more serious to your physician. Don't hesitate to ask questions that might be troubling you. If you have difficulty remembering the questions that you want to ask the doctor regarding your eye and its progress, write them down.

Monitoring the Tumor's Response

Your doctor will determine a schedule of visits with you that he feels is appropriate for monitoring your tumor's response to treatment. If you anticipate any difficulty keeping this schedule, feel free to discuss your personal concerns with the doctor. I was able to coordinate a schedule which was compatible with my work schedule and with the doctor's requirements for follow-up.

Radioactive plaque therapy can cause some complications; every person has a completely individual response. If you should develop sudden extreme blurriness in the eye, a dark blotch on the eye, severe pain or bothersome symptoms, call the doctor to discuss your symptoms. Problems

detected and addressed early enough can be dealt with more effectively. Early detection is a key to the successful treatment of side effects.

What does the Future Hold?

Now that your eye has been treated, you have to face the possibility that the malignancy could arise in other areas of the body. You should maintain a close association with a qualified internist or an oncology specialist because the next one-to-five years are going to be critical to your survival. There is no substitute for the early detection of cancer. The recommended systemic workup is; a physical exam and liver function testing twice a year, and a MRI of the abdomen and a chest x-ray once a year for life.

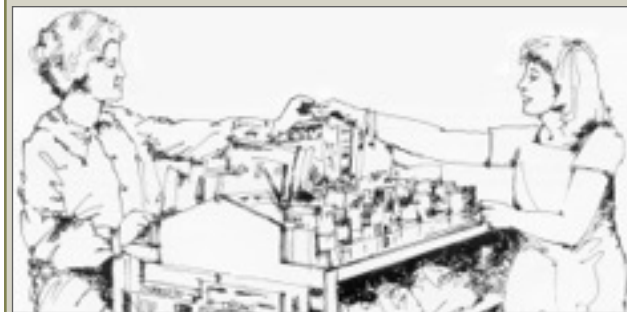
I found it very helpful to consult a psychologist regarding my fears of cancer and its complications. Your mental state is important to your state of physical well-being. If you are more comfortable with a priest, minister, rabbi, or other counselor, don't hesitate to ask him or her for advice in dealing with your concerns regarding your illness. If you can, return to an active life as quickly as possible. Return to your work. Getting involved with life is important, although you may find some of your attitudes altered by this experience.

Your chances for survival are greatly enhanced by your treatment. It is important to try to think positive. New medical discoveries are being made every day.

Questions for My Doctors:

RADIOACTIVE PLAQUE THERAPY OF EYE TUMORS

PATIENT TO PATIENT



This booklet was written by a patient with an eye tumor who underwent radioactive plaque therapy at Wills Eye Hospital's Ocular Oncology Service. The observations and suggestions contained in the booklet are based on her experience with this treatment.

To Help You Understand Your Treatment

You and I share a relatively rare condition, a malignant eye tumor, which requires a fairly unique type of treatment. The majority of us do not feel any physical pain prior to our hospitalization. However, we have already heard and faced some unpleasant facts about our intraocular tumors.

You and your family have made a decision to pursue the option of plaque radiotherapy at Wills Eye. Now, how do you best get through this treatment and follow-up?

Remember, I am writing to you patient-to-patient. Hopefully, these suggestions and observations will help answer some of the questions you might have. Then you can get down to the business of getting well.

First suggestion-RELAX. The people you have chosen at Wills to help you are top-flight professionals in their field. They have well-deserved, international reputations based on an excellent record and a sound scientific approach to our problem. The physicians at Wills cannot guarantee you miracles, but they can give you the tools you need to fight this tumor. There is good reason to be optimistic. Never give up HOPE; it's the best medicine in your arsenal.

What to Bring to the Hotel

You may be in the hotel for up to seven days. During your stay, the radioactive plaque will be in place, and you will be in isolation (a Federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulation). If, like most of us, you've never been in jail or similarly confined, you will need to plan ahead. It sounds awful to be confined to one room for so long, but it can be as good as you make it. You probably won't get a vacation like this one again!

Most of you will not really be incapacitated. Bring lots of comfortable "civilian" clothes. Casual attire is appropriate year-round. Your state of mind will be much improved by wearing street clothes when possible. If you

like more formal attire, wear it! Do what you need to keep your spirits up. Try to think of this as a camping trip: you want to be as well-prepared as possible, but you don't want to have to bring a moving van to the hotel.

Suggested Items

Books

You will be able to read quite well about one day after the implantation of the radioactive plaque, presuming that your other eye is normal. Bring two to five books (depending on the last time you took a speed reading course); more than that is overly optimistic, back-breaking and probably designed to impress the doctor. But if books are your thing, remember to bring some along.

Current Events

TV can help keep you up-to-date on the basics. Newspapers are available on a daily basis from the reception desk.

Hand Occupiers

I recommend that you bring something simple to do or make with your hands. Possibilities include one or two pieces of embroidery, knitting or crochet work, sketch pads for pencil or ink drawing, crossword puzzles and a dictionary, a Rubik's cube or a hand-held electronic game.

TV/Radio

There is a color television in every room at the hotel. I also recommend bringing a music device with comfortable headphones. Such a unit is relaxing without disturbing other patrons.

Family Snapshots

Bring a few pictures of your family. Children under 18 can't visit. Try not to let yourself get depressed if you can't see your child, niece, nephew or grandchild for a while. A picture is still worth a thousand words.

Telephone

Sometimes you are bound to feel lonely. There's

a phone in every room. Call somebody. Keep up contacts with your friends, neighbors and co-workers, or renew old acquaintances.

What to Expect from Your Surgery

Now that you've arrived, what's next?

When you arrive, you will register at the registration desk. You will then be asked to have a set in the waiting area until its time to prepare for surgery. You may think you have problems, but when you talk to some of your fellow patients you'll find a lot of very brave people. You might even make some new friends.

The implantation of the radioactive plaque is generally performed under local anesthesia. This requires one injection around the eye to numb it. There is likely to be a moderate amount of pain on the day of surgery after the anesthesia wears off. You may experience burning sensations on the eye as well as localized pain around the eye. Happily, most of the discomfort is gone within the first 24 to 48 hours but some pain can fluctuate. Mild headaches and scratchiness of the eye seem to be the worst of the problems for most patients.

You will need to wear a eye patch and shield, so you may have to practice seeing with only one eye. It will take about 24 hours for your good eye to work well independently (they are used to working as a team).

Even if you've had local anesthesia for the plaque surgery, you may be groggy the first day after surgery. This is normal. Roll with the punches. Start thinking and planning what you would like to do when you feel better. By two days after surgery, you should feel pretty good.

It is normal to have fears about radiation, but your treatment is not likely to produce any nausea, hair loss, damage to your brain or other eye, or other problems that you might have heard about or imagined. Generally, you won't feel sick in any way and you should have a good appetite.

Surgical removal of the plaque isn't too much of a problem - you went through the same type of