Will & Sophie have radiotherapy

A children’s guide to radiotherapy
Children’s Cancer and Leukaemia Group - www.cclg.org.uk
Today Will is going to visit the Radiotherapy Department. He is going to hear all about his new treatment and meet some new people. He knows all the nurses and doctors on the ward and is not sure he wants to meet any other nurses and doctors.
Will visits the Radiotherapy Department

Sitting next to Will is a little girl; Will asks her name and why she is there. She tells Will she is called Sophie and that she is going to have some radiotherapy treatment to her tummy. She says she has just met some Radiographers, who know all about radiotherapy treatment and they are very nice. Will tells Sophie he is also going to have radiotherapy and his treatment is going to be to his head.

One of the Radiographers called Dawn comes to speak to Will.

“Would you like to come with me and see what is going to happen?”

Will follows Dawn and she takes him into a big room with a machine in it. It looks a bit like the machine where Will has his scans.

“This is where you will have your treatment but before we can start the treatment we need to make a special mask to help you lie still.”

“Will the mask hurt?” Will asks.

“No, let me show you what we are going to do” said Dawn.
**Will has a mask made**

Dawn takes Will to the mask making room, and he plays with some special plastic that has lots of holes in it. He is also allowed to take some home with him so that he can make a mask, with his parents, for one of his toys. At Will’s next visit, he will have his mask made.

Will knew he would have to lie very still to have this treatment as his Mummy had talked about it. He also knows that if he was a little bit younger and couldn’t lie very still he might have had to have a special sleep, called an anaesthetic, every time he had some treatment.

At the next visit, Dawn reminds Will what is going to happen. “First we need to warm the special plastic and then lie it over your face. Some people say this feels like a warm wet flannel. The plastic keeps the shape of your head so that when it cools down it will only fit your head. To help you lie in exactly the same place, we will use the mask every time you come.”

Dawn explains that some children have to lie down on their tummies to have their treatment but Will has to lie on his back for his. The Radiographers make the mask. Will says it feels like a warm flannel. They talk to him all the time they are making it, telling him what is happening so he isn’t worried. When this is finished Dawn tells Will he will have to have a CT scan. Will has had lots of scans before so he knows what to expect.
Will waits for his scan

Will goes back to sit in the children’s waiting room and meets Sophie again. She is playing with some toys and the television is on. There are lots of toys to play with. He tells her about the mask he is having.

“I’m not having a mask” says Sophie “but I am having some special felt tip marks put on my tummy and I am going to lie on a bean bag each day to keep me in the same position.”

Will and Sophie both go away to have their scans. They are special scans with Will wearing his mask and Sophie lying on her bean bag. After the scans they go home.
The doctor called a Radiotherapist looks at the scans and starts to plan the special treatment, by drawing on the scan where the treatment is needed.

The scans are given to the technicians and physicists, who look at the area marked and make special treatment plans for Will and Sophie. The Radiographers will use these plans every time Will and Sophie have their treatment. Making these plans can take a week or two.

Will and Sophie are told that when the plans are ready, they may need to come back to the Radiotherapy Department again, for a practice session.

What happens next?
When Will comes back for his practice session, he lies on the bed, wearing his mask, which is just like lying down on the CT scanner. The bed is moved to the right position. This feels a bit strange, a little like being on a slow fairground ride. Will is asked to lie very still for a few minutes whilst the Radiographers go into the next room to take an X-ray picture. It is all very quick and doesn’t hurt, and Will’s mum watches all the time from outside the room. The Radiographers tell Will that he has done very well and that he can start his treatment very soon.
By the time Will and Sophie come to have their first treatment they are very good at lying still. They meet some new Radiographers who know all about them and their treatment. They lie down on the treatment bed just as they did on the CT scanner and simulator. They get used to being on their own in the room when the treatment is given. They know their parents and the Radiographers can see them all the time on a television screen and can talk to them even when they aren’t in the room. Each treatment is very quick, and there is nothing to see or feel, in fact it can be a bit boring, so both Will and Sophie bring in their favourite CDs to listen to. There is one treatment every day for several weeks (but not usually at weekends!).

What happens next?
Will and Sophie meet up nearly every day. Sometimes they have to see the doctor to check how they are getting on with the treatment. This takes a little longer.

If there is time Will and Sophie both go to school after their treatments. If Will can’t get to school his friends come to play with him. Sometimes they play football but if Will is tired they play inside. Will looks forward to seeing his friends very much. Will gets used to telling friends that it is fine for him to play as his radiotherapy does not make him radioactive!

More time for play!
When all the treatment is finished Will and Sophie are pleased it’s over but sorry to say goodbye to all the new people they have met. Will has completely forgotten that at the beginning he didn’t really want the radiotherapy treatment.

“I hope I see you again Sophie” says Will.

Their Mummies promise they will all meet up to play and have tea very soon.
The CCLG supports the 1,700 children who develop cancer each year in Britain and Ireland. As an association for healthcare professionals involved in their care, it works to benefit children through development of the highest standards of care. CCLG is a major provider of accredited information for patients and families.

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