

The ROCS (Radiotherapy after Oesophageal Cancer Stenting) study

Patients with incurable gullet (oesophageal) cancer can often have severe problems swallowing. This inability can require the insertion of an internal tube – a stent – to open the obstructed gullet. Whilst patients with these symptoms cannot be cured of them, the ROCS study investigated whether a short course of radiotherapy can improve outcomes and help guide future treatment for patients.

“It never fails to amaze me that terminally ill cancer patients are so willing to enter a study where there may be no direct benefit, but the potential for the development of treatments for future patients.”

NRS Cancer Research Nurse

ROCS was the first major study to examine the effect of radiotherapy on tumour bleeding with the primary outcome of determining change in the dysphagia (swallowing difficulty) score. It involved:

- Collaboration across a range of specialties including oncology, palliative care, gastroenterology and surgery.
- Questionnaires are used to study both quality of life and dysphagia after a short course of radiotherapy
- Patient follow up every two weeks by phone, alternating with one-to-one personal visits at home to ensure that the quality of life data is as complete as can be achieved.
- Such intensive follow-up is costly, but vital, as simply posting questionnaires to patients doesn't work as evidenced in past studies with low response rates.

The study is expected to present a huge amount of data on the outcomes of short, palliative radiotherapy, and how this may support future patients. Data will also be obtained on any change in overall survival rates of patients.

Patient recruitment from Scotland has been important in keeping this national study on track, with Ninewells Hospital in NHS Tayside recruiting the largest number of patients across the country. The success of the study has been the result of an enthusiastic, co-ordinated, and collaborative approach between NRS and Wales Cancer Trials Unit, and other key teams, coupled with a strong commitment from clinicians in Cardiff and Bristol, as well as from many other units.

“ROCS opened in Ninewells Hospital in 2013 and quickly recruited its first patient. We have recruited 60 patients into the study to date; our success has been due to CI/PI Dr Douglas Adamson's unfailing enthusiasm, collaboration at weekly upper GI MDT and being alerted to patients coming in for oesophageal stent by the Team in particular Upper GI Nurse Specialists.”

Senior Oncology Research Nurse at Ninewells

The **NRS Cancer Network** is funded by the Scottish Government to increase, support and sustain clinical trial activity in all phases of cancer across Scotland.

“Given that it has been a difficult study to recruit to, I am excited that recently we have been able to close the study to recruitment, reaching the target set in order to determine the benefit of radiotherapy for these patients. We think this will provide a wealth of data on how to improve palliative care and treatment resource-use for these patients, who have been relatively neglected in terms of clinical research.”

**Dr Douglas Adamson, NRS
Cancer PI and co-CI for ROCS**

