

Patient Information Leaflet

Cancer Services

Whiston Hospital, Warrington Road, Prescot L35 5DR

PICC TEAM – 0151 430 2409 (answer phone)

WARD 2A – 0151 430 1560

HAEMATOLOGY DAY UNIT – 0151 676 5206

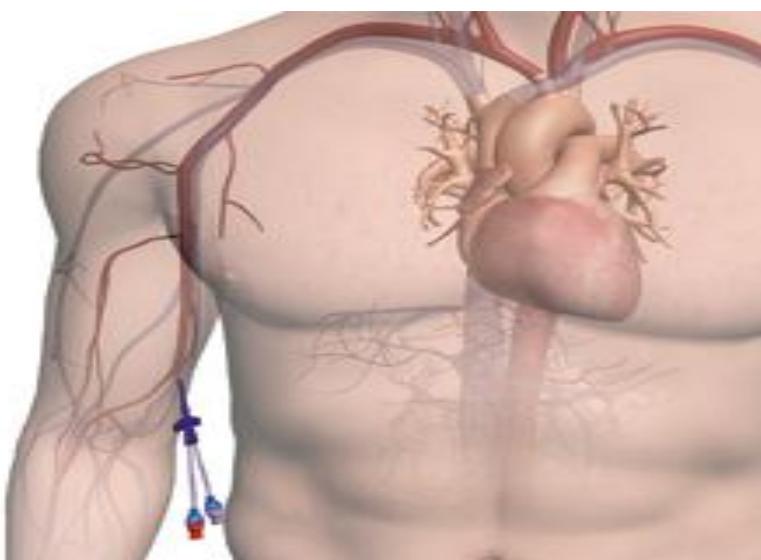
Care of your Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

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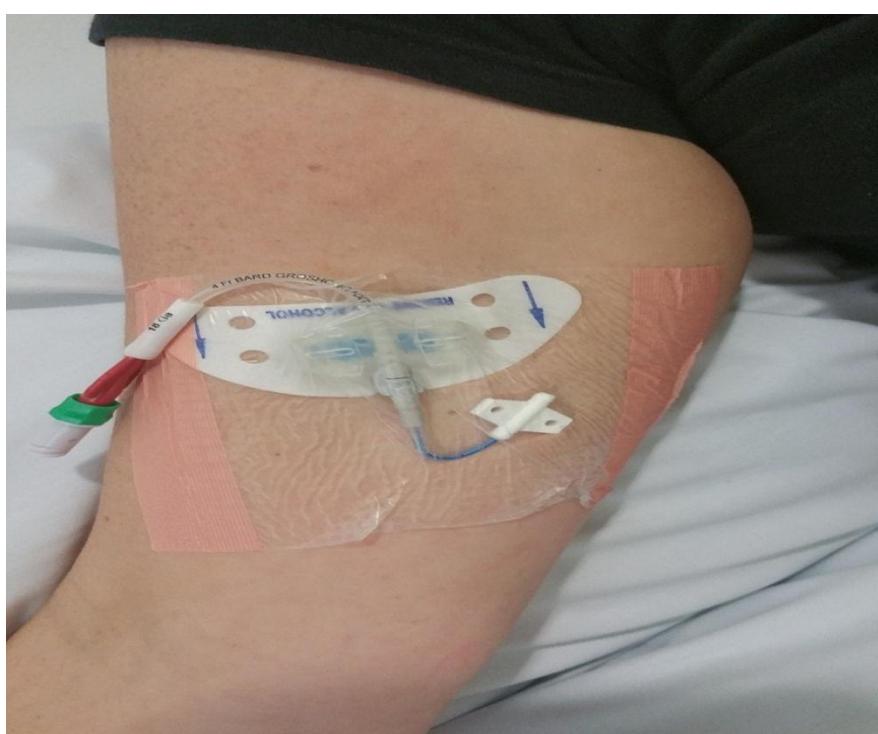
What is a (PICC)?

A PICC is a peripherally inserted central catheter. It is a thin flexible tube that is inserted into a vein in the upper arm. The PICC is then threaded along the vein so that the tip lies in one of the large veins in the chest. A specially trained nurse or doctor will insert your PICC. Not all patients are suitable for a PICC, so a doctor or nurse will assess you before one is inserted.

The illustration below shows the PICC, and where it enters the vein at the inside of the upper arm



This illustration is an example of what a PICC line will look like.



What are the benefits of having a PICC?

- PICCs are ideal for people who have small veins which may be difficult to access, or for people who are on long term treatments.
- A PICC can be used to give antibiotics, chemotherapy, blood products and other drugs directly into the vein.
- It can be used for taking blood.
- A PICC can be used in certain instances to give drugs at home, for example, antibiotics.

Are there any alternatives to a PICC?

If you do not have suitable veins for a PICC line, your doctor or nurse specialist will discuss other options with you.

How and where is the PICC inserted?

Your PICC line will be inserted by a specially trained doctor or nurse. The procedure may be done on the ward or in a specially prepared area of the hospital. Firstly, you will be assessed for suitability for this type of line, as not everyone can have a PICC line. The doctor or nurse will decide which line is suitable for you. Some PICCs have just one line or "lumen" while others have two – a bit like a road tunnel with two lanes (the procedure is the same). This allows us to give more than one drug at a time or to take blood samples while fluids are running.

If you are found to be suitable, the doctor or nurse will put on a sterile gown and gloves to help reduce the risk of infection. You will be asked to lie down on a bed while your PICC is inserted. You do not need a general anaesthetic for the procedure, but a local anaesthetic will be used to numb the area. An ultrasound machine will be used to help the doctor or nurse insert the PICC line. A needle (similar to a venflon in the back of your hand) will be used to place a small hollow tube in your arm which will be used to thread the PICC. This is then removed leaving a soft flexible PICC in place. After this the line will be tested (to see if it flushes), secured and a dressing applied. The procedure usually takes about 40 minutes.

After your PICC has been inserted, you will have a chest x-ray to confirm that your line is in the correct position (in some cases it can be confirmed at the bedside). The doctor or nurse may ask you if you can bend your arm without discomfort.

The PICC line will be held in place with steri-strips or a securement device and covered with a clear, waterproof dressing.

Discomforts which you may experience during procedure

The area where the PICC line is inserted will be numbed with a local anaesthetic. You may feel a stinging sensation initially as the local anaesthetic is injected but this will only last for a short time before the area becomes numb. The rest of the procedure should be painless, although you may experience some discomfort during the procedure.

What are the risks of having a PICC inserted?

Most PICC insertions go smoothly, but sometimes problems may occur

- Sometimes veins are small which makes it difficult to insert a PICC
- Sometimes the shape of the veins prevents the PICC from being threaded up. If this happens the doctor or nurse will often try again using a different vein which usually works.
- Sometimes the X-ray may show that the PICC is in the wrong position. If this occurs it may be that the PICC just needs to be pulled out a little or it may mean that it has to be removed and a new one inserted into a different vein.
- Sometimes bruising may occur where the needle is inserted.

Problems than can occur after insertion.

The majority of patients go through their treatment without having any problems with their PICC, but there are certain risks involved. It is very important to know what can go wrong so that you can make an informed decision about having the procedure. Please make sure that you have received satisfactory answers to your questions before consenting to having the procedure.

- **Bleeding:** Many patients experience minor bleeding around the entry site just after the PICC has been inserted. This usually stops after a few hours and causes no problems. The risk of bleeding is increased if you have problems with the clotting mechanisms of your blood. If you have a history of any abnormal bleeding or if you are taking any medication to thin your blood please ensure that you tell the person inserting the PICC.
- **Phlebitis:** Although the PICC is a very fine tube, it can sometimes irritate the inside of the vein wall in your arm during the first few days. To prevent this we will ask you to use a warm compress on the arm for 20 minutes four times a day for a few days after insertion.
- **Infection:** This can be a problem, particularly for patients who have decreased resistance to infection. We take every precaution to reduce the risk of infection: we take great care when inserting the PICC and when cleaning and

flushing it. But despite this, infections can happen at any stage. Often we treat an infection with antibiotics, but sometimes we will need to remove the PICC to prevent the infection getting worse.

- **Failure to bleed back:** A PICC is designed to allow us to take blood samples, but sometimes blood cannot be withdrawn. We can usually solve the problem by putting a special flush down the tube, but occasionally this fails, especially if the tip of the PICC is resting against the wall of the vein, stopping blood from being drawn back into the line. This is not a serious complication but it can be disappointing – nobody likes having blood tests taken with a needle. If this happens to you we will do all we can to get the line bleeding again.
- **Thrombosis or Clotting:** Having a PICC sitting in a vein does mean there is a risk of causing a blood clot. If this occurs it is preferable to treat the thrombus whilst still using the PICC line.
- **Split Line:** It is very important to prevent the PICC from getting damaged – for example, you should never use scissors near it. In the unlikely event that the PICC develops a split or a break, we will usually remove it, although occasionally it is possible for it to be repaired using special equipment.

Consequences of not having a PICC inserted

If you decide that you do not wish to have a PICC inserted it is important that you discuss this with your doctor or nurse. It may be that your treatment can be given through a venflon which will have to be replaced every 72 hours or sooner. However, some treatments cannot be given through a venflon, as this could have an adverse effect on your health.

Who will care for your PICC?

In Hospital

Nursing staff will look after your PICC. This involves:

- Cleaning the exit site and PICC line with a chlorhexidine antiseptic and applying a clean dressing weekly.
- Change of fixing device (statlock) weekly.
- Replacing the bung with a new sterile bung after cleaning hub with Sani-cloth weekly.
- Flushing the line weekly with sterile saline which will prevent blockage when not in use.
- Cleaning the lumen (end) before each use with a Sani-cloth wipe, allowing at least 30 seconds for it to dry.

At home

When you leave hospital we will contact the district nurse who will call to your home and care for your PICC line as we would do in hospital. In some instances you may be asked to attend a day ward for regular blood checks or treatment, if this is the case, the nurse will also care for your PICC.

It is important that any person who comes in to contact with your PICC line that they clean their hands and wear gloves

How will I know if something is wrong?

Sometimes problems can occur while you have a PICC line. If you suspect something is wrong, or if you have any of the following, contact the hospital straight away –

- If you have a temperature above 37.5C, fever, chills or generally feel unwell. This could be the beginning of an infection.
- Oozing from around the line
- Cracks or leaks in the line
- Pain, redness, or swelling around the site, in your neck or arm, this could be a sign that the tip has moved and a blood clot has formed on one of the veins.
- If your PICC becomes dislodged.

If you are worried about your PICC please do not hesitate to contact the hospital

Frequently asked questions

Can I eat and drink before having my PICC inserted?

Yes, you can eat and drink before having your PICC inserted

Can I have a bath or shower and swim?

Any advice we give about a particular activity or sport takes into account the risks of infection or damage to your PICC. As a general rule, we encourage people with PICCs to take a shower. This is preferable to submerging your line and PICC in water because of the risk of infection. We also advise keeping the area as dry as possible by, either wrapping cling film around the dressing site, or using specialised water tight devices (e.g. Limbo) whilst showering.

Can I lead a normal social life?

Having a PICC should not interfere with your social life. However, if your PICC line insertion is for the purpose of chemotherapy drugs, this may temporarily restrict certain social activities either immediately after treatment or if your 'blood counts' are low. Your nurse or doctor will give you more specific information.

Can I play sports?

Sports such as tennis and golf or vigorous gym exercises are discouraged because there is a risk that your PICC could become dislodged caused by excessive upper body movement. If in doubt ask your doctor or nurse.

Can I go on holiday?

Please talk to your doctor before planning a trip abroad. It is possible to take a holiday at home or abroad with a PICC. However, you need to consider the type of treatment you are having, the duration and destination of your holiday and whether you have someone to help care for your PICC. If you do travel by air, carry all medication in your hand luggage

**Ensure that your medical insurance cover is adequate and inform
your insurer.**

Will my PICC affect my sex life?

Having a PICC should not interfere with your sex life. To minimise the risk of damage to your PICC, ensure that it is secure before any sexual activity. However, sometimes while you are feeling unwell or having treatments for cancer you may lose interest in sex. This is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about.

Please use this space to write down any questions you might have

Any recommendations from the clinician

Useful Contact Numbers

PICC Team

0151 430 2409 (answer phone)

Ward 2A

0151 430 1560

Haematology Day Unit (Satchi Suite)

0151 676 5206

Lilac Centre

01744 646169

01744 646170

This leaflet can be made available in alternative languages/formats on request.

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