Peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC line)

Information to accompany consent
What is a PICC line?

PICC stands for ‘peripherally inserted central venous catheter’. A PICC is a very narrow plastic tube, about 60cm (two feet) long, and is inserted into a large vein in your arm. It is then threaded into one of the larger veins that lead to your heart.

Why do I need a PICC line?

The most common reasons that it may be felt that you would benefit from a PICC line are:

- to enable you to receive continuous / intermittent drug therapies, either at home or in the hospital
- or
- if your treatment causes discomfort
- or
- if it is difficult to give medications or take blood samples from the veins in your arm or hand.

How is a PICC line put in?

The consultant in charge of your care will arrange for your PICC line to be placed.

Once the whole process has been explained and you feel you have had your questions answered, a specially trained Practitioner will ask you to sign a consent form before you have a PICC line inserted.

The practitioner will use an ultrasound device to help locate the best vein in your arm. This is totally painless.
Your arm will be cleaned and you will be given a local anaesthetic. This consists of a small injection under the skin. In order to prevent infection, your arm will be cleaned and covered with a sterile towel. The practitioner will wear a hat and mask, sterile gown and gloves.

Placement can take about 30 to 45 minutes and will be carried out at your bedside.

The correct position of the PICC line will be confirmed using 3CG technology. This means that a small Y-shaped plastic box will be placed on your chest for the duration of the procedure. This box will enable the PICC practitioner to follow the PICC line on the computer screen as it is fed into the vein, and make sure that it goes in the right direction. You will also have two electrocardiogram (ECG) pads on your skin. This will allow the PICC placer to look at your heart trace for the final confirmation of the PICC line position.

If the 3CG cannot be used, a chest X ray will be performed. This X ray will be looked at carefully to make sure that the PICC is in a good position before we begin to use it.

Once inserted, the PICC line can usually stay in your arm throughout your treatment and can last up to a year.

**Caring for a PICC line**

Once a PICC line is in place, it needs to be looked after carefully to help prevent complications occurring.

This line care can be carried out by trained nurses from your ward or your local district nurses if you are discharged home with the line in place.

Your PICC will need line care every week, including:

- Re-dressing the PICC on your arm to reduce the risk of infection and keep the line in place securely.
- Flushing the PICC with saline solution to reduce the risk of the line blocking in between uses.
Having a shower or a bath?

Your PICC line will have a semi-waterproof see-through dressing over it all the time. It is best that you have a shower rather than a bath. The dressing will stay in place while you shower; however, we recommend that you use a waterproof shower sleeve or plastic bag to cover it. In order to get a waterproof shower sleeve, you will be given a request for a prescription, which has to be taken to your GP practice. The GP will then provide a prescription, which can be taken to any pharmacy.

If you wish to have a bath, please keep your arm out of the water, as soaking it in the bath could remove the dressing and cause infection.

What should I avoid doing?

If you have been discharged home with a PICC line in place, there are certain activities you should avoid.

It is recommended that you don’t go swimming whilst you have a PICC line, this can cause an infection in your line and soak off the dressing.

If you have a specific job or hobby that requires a lot of repetitive arm movement (for example fly-fishing, golf, painting and decorating) please discuss with the practitioner as repetitive motion can cause the line to migrate or break.

What should I do if I have a problem with my PICC line?

You will be monitored for any signs of complications, and in the majority of cases, if a problem is detected it can be successfully treated.

Complications with PICC lines are rare, but it is important that you know about them and inform a nurse or contact the hospital ward if you suspect something.
In the following emergency situations, you should inform a nurse or contact your hospital department immediately for further advice.

Rare complications include:

**Phlebitis (inflammation of the vein)**
You might experience redness, pain or discomfort above the insertion site, and difficulty bending your arm comfortably.

**Thrombosis (clots)**
(Less than 3 in every 100 patients)
You might notice discomfort in your shoulder, your ‘PICC arm’ may become swollen or red, or you may notice a change or swelling of the veins in your neck.

**Infection / cellulitus**
(Between 1 and 3 in every 100 patients)
You might experience redness or oozing at the PICC exit site, and may develop a fever (temperature greater than 38°C).

**Bleeding**
You may experience some bleeding from the site of the PICC line (on your arm) within the first 24 hours after insertion.

**The PICC line breaks, becomes damaged or leaks**
If your PICC line breaks or splits, it is very important that you contact the hospital immediately. Do not delay.
Removal of PICC

Once your treatment is completed your PICC will need removing. The skin is cleaned and the PICC is gently pulled out, pressure will be applied to stop any bleeding and a dressing over the insertion site should stay in place for 24 hours. This will be carried out by your ward nurse or if in the community an outpatient’s appointment maybe necessary with the Vascular Access Team.

Hospital inpatients

If you have any questions or concerns raised by this leaflet, please inform the nurse in charge of your PICC line care.

Discharged patients

Please contact the ward you were discharged from if you have any concerns.

If you do not have the ward phone number available, please call the hospital switchboard on 0117 9505050 and request to be connected with the appropriate ward. Alternatively you can leave a message on the vascular access service phone on 07514930223.
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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