Introduction
This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your PICC line and how it will be cared for. It can be used to give you long term treatments such as antibiotics, blood transfusions and intravenous nutrition.

What is a PICC line?
A PICC line is a ‘peripherally inserted central venous catheter’. It is a long, thin, flexible tube (about 50cm long) known as a catheter which is inserted into a vein above your elbow. The PICC is designed to reach a larger vein in your chest, however you will only be aware of a small length of line resting on your arm.

Why do I need a PICC line?
- PICC lines are often used if you are going to receive treatment (e.g. antibiotics) into a vein for more than a few weeks.
- The major benefits of PICC lines are that they can stay in place for as long as needed and avoid the discomfort of having repeated injections / venflons (needles).
- They are ideal if you have veins that are difficult to find.

How is a PICC line put in?
A Consultant Anaesthetist or Specialist Nurse will discuss the procedure. You will have the opportunity to ask questions. If you are happy to proceed, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

- The insertion of the PICC line is not an operation but will be treated as a sterile procedure.
- Ultrasound is used to locate the best vein in your upper arm.
- You will be given a small injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area where the line will be put in.
- Your arm will be cleaned and covered with sterile towels.
- The medical staff will wear a sterile gown and gloves.
- Inserting the PICC line can take 30-60 minutes.
- There will be a semi waterproof, see through dressing on the entry site.
- After the PICC line is inserted successfully, you will be given a chest x-ray to ensure the PICC line is in the correct position before use.

Following your PICC line insertion
Sometimes the arm above the PICC line can become tender and inflamed. Heat applied to the muscle area of your arm above the PICC line can help. Any tenderness should disappear within 2-7 days.

Caring for PICC lines
Once the PICC line is in place, it needs to be looked after carefully to prevent problems occurring. Initially the dressing is changed after 24 hours and then weekly. The weekly care will consist of:
- Changing the dressing to reduce the risk of infection and to keep the line in place and secure.
- Flushing the line with a sterile saline solution to reduce the risk of the PICC line blocking between uses.

Can I have a bath or shower?
Your PICC line will have a semi-waterproof, see-through dressing over it. It is advisable to cover this dressing with a plastic bag, plastic sleeve or cling film when showering. This should prevent the dressing coming off and will reduce the risk of infection. If you have a bath, then please keep your arm out of the water.
What should I avoid doing?

You should be able to carry out all day-to-day activities. It is advisable not to go swimming whilst you have a PICC line because of the risk of infection. If you have a specific job or hobby which requires a lot of repetitive movement (e.g. fly fishing, golf, bell ringing, painting and decorating) please discuss this with the Nurse or Doctor.

Are there any complications with PICC lines?

Complications with PICC lines are unusual, but it is important to know about these. Rare complications include:

Inflammation of the veins (phlebitis)
You may experience redness, pain or discomfort above the PICC line insertion site.

Infection/Cellulitis
You may experience redness and/or oozing at the PICC insertion site and may develop a fever (temperature above 38°C).

Clots (thrombosis)
You might notice a discomfort in your PICC line arm or shoulder. It may become red and swollen, or you may notice swelling of the veins of your neck.

Bleeding
You may have some bleeding from the insertion site of the PICC line within the first 24 hours after insertion: this is normal.

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

Discuss with the nursing team looking after you or if you are no longer an in-patient contact the hospital’s Emergency Department if:
- Your PICC line (or dressing) becomes dislodged, is broken or is leaking
- You feel generally unwell
- You develop a temperature or chills
- The area around the point where the line goes into the arm becomes red, swollen, sore or oozes

How will my PICC line be removed?

When you no longer require your PICC line, it will be removed by one of the nurses. This is not painful and is done by gently sliding the PICC line from the insertion site. A waterproof dressing will be applied which can be removed after 48 hours.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact one of the PICC line team.