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Pelvic stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) reirradiation: UK SABR consortium guidance for use in routine clinical care[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) is routinely used for the management of oligometastatic disease. Increasingly, there is overlap of targets or organs at risk with previous radiotherapy fields. As substantial variation in delivery of clinical practice exists, the UK SABR Consortium worked with a collaborative national group to develop pelvic SABR re-irradiation consensus guidelines. The scope of the guidance includes patient selection criteria, pre-treatment considerations, delineation guidelines, dose prescription, calculations of cumulative dose constraints, and optimal planning technique. This guidance is part of an ongoing national prospective audit in collaboration with the Royal College of Radiologists and EORTC ReCare.

Introduction

Pelvic stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) re-irradiation is used in locally recurrent and oligometastatic disease, most commonly

in prostate and colorectal cancer [1]. Target sites can include pelvic or inguinal lymph nodes, soft tissue deposits, the prostate or pelvic bones. The aims of treatment are different in each clinical case. For example, in prostate cancer, SABR can delay the introduction of androgen

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deprivation therapy (ADT) [2,3]. In locally recurrent rectal cancer (LRRC), SABR may be offered as an ablative alternative to total pelvic exenteration [4] or to avoid a switch to a palliative strategy [5].

The international Delphi consensus [6] underscored the complexity of pelvic SABR re-irradiation, revealing lack of consensus agreement in certain areas, particularly pertaining to cumulative organ at risk (OAR) dose-volume constraints. This is a result of the paucity and quality of published data, often highly heterogeneous, and predominantly retrospective single institution series [7,8]. The literature to date often has poorly described dosimetric planning details, as highlighted and addressed by the ESTRO/EORTC consensus publication on re-irradiation: definition, reporting and clinical decision-making [9]. In addition, there is often no longer-term follow-up and rarely quality of life data presented. Due to all these factors, despite pelvic SABR re-irradiation being routinely used, there is real equipoise regarding planning and delivery.

In response to these challenges, the UK SABR Consortium led the development of a guidance document for the routine delivery of pelvic SABR re-irradiation in the UK, by an experienced multi-disciplinary team. While these guidelines remain pragmatic given the paucity of available clinical evidence, they serve as a starting point toward harmonizing clinical implementation and practice. Standardisation will enable more consistent outcome auditing, development of practical, experience-based guidance and provide data to inform future clinical trials, following the precedent set by the early pioneers of SABR [10].

We aim to discuss the evolution of this guidance, highlight proposed planning and delivery details from the guidance in areas of clinical equipoise, and discuss future plans to measure the feasibility, safety and outcomes of the guidance.

Materials and methods

In 2015, National Health Service (NHS) England launched a Commissioning through Evaluation (CtE) program for the delivery of pelvic SABR re-irradiation for oligometastatic disease. The National Radiotherapy Trials Quality Assurance Group (RTTQA) SABR QA Program led the roll-out of SABR across NHS England, requiring the department and individual radiation oncologists to complete a series of tasks to attain full accreditation and be approved to deliver SABR in the NHS. Fig. 1 details the steps required. However, while the CtE program detailed strict criteria for eligibility of pelvic SABR re-irradiation and defined a dose (30 Gy in 5 fractions), planning guidance was minimal. It stated only that “standard SABR constraints should be considered absolute maximums and where an OAR had received a significant dose

from the initial radiation course, a biological effective dose (BED) tolerance remaining calculation should be made and equivalent tolerance in 5 fractions determined”. During benchmarking and prospective planning assessment, no formal calculations of OAR cumulative constraints were mandated or performed. A subsequent survey performed of planning practice during CtE, reported different methods of addressing OAR constraints; both across different centres, but also between different clinicians within the same centre. Methods included the use of OAR dose-volume SABR constraints as for a radiation-naive pelvis; allowing for 30–50 % recovery from the initial radiation dose to OARs [6,8,11]; a cumulative constraint as per historic spinal cord data by Nieder et al. [12]; a maximum cumulative constraint published by Abusaris et al. [13]; and, finally, others calculated the dose they wished to be delivered to the target and worked back to identify the recovery required to allow for that [1,14].

Between 2015 and 2018, 8 centres delivered pelvic SABR re-irradiation to 185 patients fulfilling set criteria. Median age was 68 years with 61.1 % being male. The most treated pathology was prostate cancer (39.5 %), followed by colorectal cancer (28.6 %). In January 2021, CtE reported an estimated 92 % 1-year overall survival (OS) and 76 % 1-year local control (LC), with only 3.8 % grade 3 and no grade 4 or 5 toxicities observed. Although encouraging, the quality of the collected data was poor and there was significant heterogeneity of patients, sites and planning and delivery methods.

In 2021, pelvic SABR re-irradiation was commissioned for routine use by NHS England, but uncertainty remained regarding how this should be delivered. The UK SABR Consortium facilitate the safe implementation and ongoing delivery of SABR across the UK, one aspect of this is producing national guidance for each SABR indication. In accordance with the NICE guideline development framework [15], a multidisciplinary group conducted a scoping exercise, reviewing relevant evidence and surveying the eight CtE centres on the method of OAR calculation used during CtE. Draft guidance was circulated around members of the UK Consortium Committee (RM, CD, PD, PD, AD, JG, FM, TR, AT, TMT) with the addition of radiobiological expert (BJ). Following appropriate amendments, the guidance was reviewed and edited by a further group, including all those accredited in CtE and others planning to achieve accreditation (EC, LM, MR, JS, TS-S, AZ). The UK SABR Consortium Committee approved the final guidance, which was launched via an editorial in *Clinical Oncology* in 2023 [14]. Accredited centres and other interested UK centres were invited, by email, to adopt the guidelines and the guidance was presented at multiple national educational meetings to elicit feedback and encourage engagement.

Requirements for accreditation for delivery of SABR pelvic reirradiation:

1. A facility questionnaire to assess whether appropriate equipment and resources were in place for safe and effective delivery of SABR pelvic reirradiation.
2. A process document to assess whether suitable end-to-end processes were implemented for the safe and effective delivery of SABR pelvic reirradiation.
3. A remote end-to-end dosimetry audit to ensure an adequate planning and delivery process had been established for the accurate delivery of SABR.
4. Nodal contouring benchmarking case to assess each radiation oncologists' ability to contour target volumes and associated organs at risk (OARs).
5. Nodal planning benchmarking case to ensure optimal planning techniques had been developed maximising dose to the target whilst sparing OARs.
6. Prospective outlining and planning review of the first 3 reirradiation clinical cases at each centre.

Fig. 1. Steps required for departmental and individual full accreditation to be approved to deliver SABR in NHS England.

Results

A summary of the guidance as published in 2022 is provided in [Appendix A](#).

Highlights from guidance in areas of clinical equipoise

Dose prescription

Two different dose prescriptions are available for two distinct patient groups:

1 Limiting toxicity: Primarily for prostate cancer patients with available systemic options, where the goal is to delay ADT. Proposed dose is 30 Gy in 5 fractions.

This dose is based on the original CtE prescription.

2 Maximizing local control: Primarily for rectal and gynaecological cancer patients who are not for exenteration surgery due to ineligibility or patient choice. An isotoxic dose-escalation approach is recommended, using the cumulative OAR constraints outlined below, up to a maximum of 45 Gy in 5 fractions, if image verification is adequate [13,16–18]. [Fig. 2](#) illustrates an isotoxic plan in a patient with LRRC.

Dose-escalation in rectal tumours is supported by modelling studies linking increased BED to longer tumour control [6,19]. For a tumour with an alpha/beta (α/β) ratio of 5 Gy, increasing the retreatment dose per fraction from 5.3 Gy to 6.4 Gy over 5 fractions is predicted to extend time to progression (TTP) by 33.7%. Reducing it from 6.3 Gy to 5.7 Gy over 5 fractions shortens TTP by 17.5%. Retrospective colorectal cancer studies also correlate higher BED with improved LC [4]. In keeping with findings from modelling studies, a cohort of 69 patients treated as per CtE, showed 30 Gy in 5 fractions was insufficient for LC, with 42.6% having a local recurrence at death or last follow up and local relapse contributing to 58.3% of deaths [4]. With the variation in relevant OARs in pelvic SABR re-irradiation, isotoxic dose-escalation (increasing dose until OAR constraints are met) is ideally placed to maximise dose without impacting toxicity. It has been delivered in prospective trials with improved cancer outcomes and maintained toxicity and quality of life [20,21]. A planning study in LRRC showed EQD₂ to $\geq 80\%$ of the

PTV could be escalated from 43 Gy to 61 Gy without exceeding OAR limits [22]. As such, an option for a more ablative dose in this group where LC has such a significant effect on quality of life and survival, and where the alternative is pelvic exenteration was deemed acceptable.

Cumulative dose calculations

There is currently no high-quality clinical evidence or international consensus [6] on the optimal constraints for pelvic SABR re-irradiation. Limited data exist to support assumptions around tissue repair over time. It is also likely that the degree and timing of recovery is different for different organs. The approach outlined here is pragmatic and based on the most common method used in the CtE program [1].

- For patients with 6–18 months from their previous RT, a 30% recovery may be incorporated into the original dose delivered when performing calculations for OAR dose-volume constraints.
- For patients with > 18 months from their previous RT, a 50% recovery may be incorporated into the original dose delivered when performing calculations for OAR dose-volume constraints.

The 18-month threshold is derived from calculations using photon-based retreatment, based on spinal cord modelling work by Moore et al and Woolley et al. [23,24]. These suggest a moderate recovery between 6–18 months, with limited further recovery beyond 18 months. They have developed automated software which calculates proposed constraints using both standard factors (e.g. previous dose and time from previous radiotherapy) and additional risk factors of poor recovery (e.g., extensive prior pelvic surgery, diabetes, vasculopathies, advanced age or prior systemic therapy) by introducing a conservation factor. A comparison of their method and the method proposed in the guidance is presented in [Appendix 3](#) within full guidance. The table within the guidance shows dose-volume constraints calculated by each model. Particularly in cases where minimising toxicity is key, a more conservative approach with less recovery may be appropriate.

[Appendix 3](#) within the full guidance, demonstrates two examples of calculation of OAR constraints. Awareness of inaccuracies in the

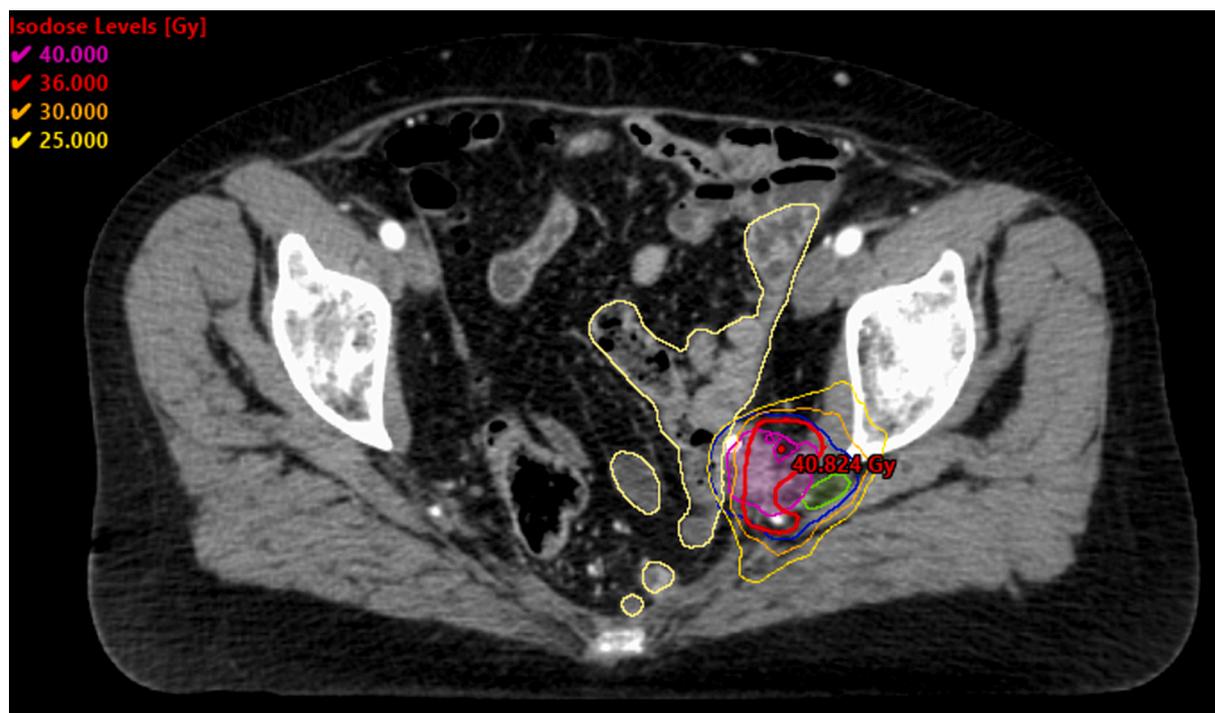


Fig. 2. Isotoxic plan to limited to prescription dose of 35 Gy in 5 fractions by small bowel and lumbosacral plexus. (GTV = magenta; Small bowel = yellow; Lumbosacral plexus = green).

assessment of cumulative doses is required, especially when there have been large deformations between treatment courses.

Discussion

Clinical context

This guidance represents a pragmatic, consensus-based national framework for the delivery of pelvic SABR re-irradiation. While it offers structured recommendations, clinical judgment remains central, and individual treatment decisions should be tailored to each patient's context. The guidance is intended to support both national and international colleagues, recognising that variations may be required in different clinical scenarios.

The very recent publication of the DESTROY-1 trial, which had two cohorts where SABR re-irradiation was delivered to a variety of different sites to 121 lesions in 97 patients, including 49 lesions in the pelvis [25]. This phase I trial reported reaching the planned maximum tolerated dose (MTD) in two cohorts, one in patients who had previously received EQD2, $\alpha/\beta:3 < 60$ Gy treated in 50 Gy in 5 fractions, the other in patients having received EQD2, $\alpha/\beta:3 > 60$ Gy who received 45 Gy in 5 fractions. Seventeen of 121 lesions treated had dose levels dropped due to planning concerns. Toxicity was limited to grade 1–2 other than one pelvic and one skin grade 4 toxicity. This concurs with the aim of the guidance, that higher doses where clinically appropriate are safe and deliverable. The publication acknowledges the DESTROY-1 trial was designed 20 years ago and, as such, isotoxic re-irradiation and its potential benefits in this setting had not been developed. The guidance presented here builds on the DESTROY-1 trial, with more novel radiation techniques and allowing the delivery of lower prescription doses for those clinical cases where higher doses are unlikely to offer meaningful clinical benefit.

Limitations

Indications for SABR pelvic re-irradiation continue to evolve and more novel indications such as re-irradiation of locally recurrent prostate cancer, were not included during development of this guidance [26–28]. Clinical trials would, ideally, be conducted for each indication, however patient heterogeneity complicates trial design, requiring individualized dose prescriptions, treatment strategies, and outcome measures. Given these limitations, ongoing high-quality prospective data collection remains a preferable means of validating safety and efficacy. The unified adoption of this guidance across the UK will support these validation efforts.

Audit design

A national prospective audit was launched on publication of the guidance, led by Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) Clinical Oncology Quality Improvement and Audit Committee (COQIAC) [14]. The audit will assess feasibility and safety and report outcomes of pelvic SABR re-irradiation delivered using the guidance. Centres are prospectively collecting patient and tumour demographics, toxicity and outcome datapoints, as well as patient reported outcome measures at baseline and 1 year. The RCR will collect these datapoints in 2026 for interrogation. The dataset will also be designed in collaboration with ReCare (EORTC 2011-RP) to maximise collaborative efforts and learning (NCT03818503).

Future directions

The guidance aims to support harmonisation of treatment planning and delivery across centres in the UK, assess feasibility and safety, and generate data to inform future clinical trials and model-based approaches, including combined datasets for tumour control probability

(TCP) and normal tissue complication probability (NTCP) modelling. The ongoing audit will be instrumental in identifying practice variation, challenges of reirradiation and highlight improvements to inform iterations of the guidance moving forward.

In parallel, multiple technical advances for treatment planning and delivery of reirradiation are on the horizon that will be discussed elsewhere in this issue, for example improved software with incorporation of summation of previous plans using different fractionations, use of deformable registration for planning and real-time adaptive radiotherapy (ART).

The challenges of trials in this setting is whether to include multiple histology's / sites, in a basket type trial which may offer less insights into a larger population, or have a specific question in a specific tumour group which will definitively answer a question in a small population such as the ongoing TORCH-R [NCT05628038] trial, which is investigating the optimal integration and sequencing of systemic therapies with SABR re-irradiation in locally recurrent rectal cancer. Ultimately, the validation of SABR re-irradiation through prospective international trials will be critical to establish its safety, efficacy, and generalisability across healthcare settings and the presented guidance and planned audit is an important step forward in establishing a population and a gold standard for future trials.

Conclusion

This guidance, written on behalf of the UK SABR Consortium, serves as a practical resource to facilitate consistent and pragmatic pelvic SABR re-irradiation. The planned audit will inform future iterations of this guidance, offer unique insight into critical OAR dose constraints and assumed recovery, and support and drive the development of clinical trials in this area.

Ethics and dissemination

The clinical guidance was developed by the UK SABR Consortium working group and approved by UK SABR Consortium.

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Declaration of competing interest

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tipsro.2025.100326>.

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