

## Patient Information: PICCs and Withdrawal Occlusions

### What is a Withdrawal Occlusion?

Before using your PICC line, the nurse attaches a syringe and draws back, checking for flashback. **Flashback** is defined as blood from the vascular system that is seen in the PICC tubing and/or syringe, following aspiration.

The nurse checks for flashback to (1) ensure that the PICC line is clear (patent); and, (2) to ensure that the PICC tip is positioned within a large blood vessel.

When the nurse cannot obtain flashback, we say that there is a withdrawal occlusion. **Withdrawal Occlusions** are the inability to withdraw blood from the catheter with the ability to infuse fluid. This means that the nurse can inject fluid but he/she cannot aspirate blood back.

### Why do Withdrawal Occlusions happen?

PICC occlusions occur for many reasons and may include kinking, malposition, PICC line rupture or breakage. Some medications may occlude the PICC line. The most common reasons for occlusion are fibrin sheaths or clots.

### How are Withdrawal Occlusion treated?

All persistent withdrawal occlusions require an x-ray to ensure that the tip of the PICC is in the correct position. If your Physician suspects that the withdrawal occlusion is caused by fibrin or a clot, a medication will need to be instilled into your PICC line to dissolve the fibrin or clot.

Your Saint Elizabeth nurse will determine how urgently your PICC requires a Physician to look at it. Some medications cannot be infused into a PICC line when there is a withdrawal occlusion because they can damage your vein or skin tissue if the PICC is not in a large blood vessel. There are instances when it may be safe for your nurse to continue to use your PICC while you are waiting to see a Physician.

It is very important that all withdrawal occlusions be cleared. If your PICC line has a withdrawal occlusion that is not resolved, even after you have had an x-ray confirming placement, you are at risk for:

- PICC related infection
- Medication complications
- Tissue and/or vein damage
- Swelling, pain
- Deep Vein Thrombosis (clot)
- Complete occlusion of your PICC, which may require a replacement PICC to be inserted