



## Media Release

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### **New Cancer Centre for Christchurch**

Christchurch's St George's Hospital is to develop a new comprehensive cancer service on its Merivale site.

The \$16 million purpose-built facility is expected to open in early 2010. It will be the first private radiation therapy clinic in the South Island and, with MercyAscot's new unit now open in Auckland, the St George's unit will be the second in New Zealand.

Tony Hunter, Chief Executive Officer of St George's Hospital, said that the concept had been under investigation for about four years.

"For St George's to be a leading health service provider we need to have a full range of services. We do cancer surgery now and this is a logical extension. The clinic is all about choice, being looked after by the same consultant oncologist during the treatment period, being able to access psychosocial and whole-person care and having access to a complete range chemotherapy drugs and palliative treatments. A special advantage is that all services will be available on the same site.

"We have had numerous discussions with the Canterbury District Health Board over the last few years, looking at the concept and possible structures. As a result of these discussions we have agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding covering a wide range of areas where we will work together," he said.

The new clinic will comprise a high-tech building, initially housing one linear accelerator and CT scanner with space for a second accelerator in the future. Equipment for the clinic will cost \$6-7 million, building costs making up the rest.

Dr Chris Atkinson and Dr Chris Wynne, oncologists involved in the project, say there is a need now for another linear accelerator in Christchurch and they believe the new facility will attract consultant oncologists and radiation therapists from overseas.

"High tech radiotherapy treatments, not currently available in Christchurch, will be introduced."

Tony Hunter says a new Trust dedicated to Christchurch cancer treatment will purchase the equipment and lease it to the Centre. Revenue from the lease and from public donations will fund cancer-related activities such as cancer research at the Centre; education programmes for staff, patients and public; and fund support services for patients and their families. The Trust will also provide funds for future acquisitions of the latest cancer-related equipment.

This approach will provide an opportunity for the public to support the Trust and help in a practical way. It will also enable a high level of collaboration and community involvement in the project.”

“Over the past few weeks the Hospital has been talking with a wide range of cancer-related groups, both as a courtesy and to ensure the proposed services link with those already supplied. We are not in competition with them, we will be providing a complementary service,” he said.

St George’s Clinic expects to treat between 500 and 900 patients in the first year of which 45% are likely to receive radiotherapy.

“From 01 July 2007 there has been a significant increase in the chemotherapy benefit provided by Southern Cross Insurance, whilst Tower and Sovereign have provided an oncology benefit for some time. Combined, these three companies comprise 90% of the health insurance market.

“There is much work to be undertaken before the Clinic becomes a reality. We are presently actively involved with our consultants, designing the Clinic and working through the resource consents,” he said.

Dr Philippa Mercer, a breast surgeon at Canterbury Breast Care Ltd, said that the radiation therapy clinic was an excellent addition to healthcare in the city. “It further complements the total care package available for private care patients,” she said.

**Further information:**

Tony Hunter            phone 0-3-355-1628; 0274-750-306; e-mail [tony.hunter@stgeorges.org.nz](mailto:tony.hunter@stgeorges.org.nz)

Dr Chris Atkinson    phone 027 522 8447; e-mail [hannahandchris@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hannahandchris@xtra.co.nz)