

# St George's Cancer Care Centre opens

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Birds chirp, light flickers through the native trees and fish dart amongst the coral. It seems a world away from the struggles of cancer, and that's the point.

The first private cancer care centre in New Zealand to offer both radiation and chemotherapy treatment is opening at St George's Hospital in Strowan at the end of this month.

The new \$17million St George's Cancer Care Centre will also offer oncology consultations and other cancer care services.

St George's Hospital chief executive Tony Hunter said stage one, the chemotherapy service, has been operating for a year and the new radiation services will start after it opens on March 29.

"For the first time patients have a choice in how they receive their cancer treatment.

They can opt to have their treatment at the public hospital or privately at St George's," Mr Hunter said.

The centre contains two concrete bunkers with walls 2.2m thick, housing two linear accelerators and a CT scanner.

"The Elekta Linear Accelerators, valued at over \$3.5m each, allow advanced radiation treatment technologies which have not previously been available in the South Island," Mr Hunter said.

Key staff include oncologists Associate Professor Chris Atkinson and Dr Chris Wynne, who have more than 55 years experience between them, medical oncology specialist Dr David Gibbs, clinical nurse manager Bronwyn Ward and clinical manager of radiation treatment Viv Ali.



Brand new: St George's Cancer Care Centre's clinical manager of radiation treatment Viv Ali, centre, and medical radiation technologists Andy Savin and Miranda Harrison, with one of the two new linear accelerators.

Photo: Samantha Carstens.

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Viv Ali said the centre is creating more treatment capacity for cancer patients which will in turn reduce waiting times.

"It's absolutely amazing, we're very lucky to have the latest technology in an environment that's just stunning."

The theme of the building is New Zealand nature and includes picture panels of native bush, theatre lighting mimicking water and tree shadows, a saltwater aquarium and an audio visual system.

Mr Hunter said he really wanted it to have a wow factor.

"Cancer is difficult enough for patients, so we wanted an interior design that our patients would enjoy and feel comfortable bringing friends and family along to support them," he said.

Charitable trust the St George's

Cancer Institute has been raising money for the equipment, which it will lease to the centre.

Mr Hunter said funding for the two linear accelerators has now reached \$4.3m of the \$7m target and has been greatly assisted by very generous donations from Tim and Cilla Glasson, the Luney family in memory of Charles Seymour Luney and the Judith Ross family and Christchurch Radiology Group in memory of David Ross.

Staff moved in to the building at the beginning of February and some clinics and treatments are already underway.

Financial donors, clinicians and support agencies are being shown around the centre and a public open day will be held on Saturday March 27 between 9am and 1pm.