

World-class care in regional QLD

\$7 million expansion for St Andrew's Toowoomba Cancer Care Centre

"St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre is arguably one of the most advanced cancer centres in regional Australia"

Access to the most advanced radiotherapy treatment has just become easier for rural and regional patients on the Darling Downs.

The \$7 million expansion to the Cancer Care Centre was officially opened by Senator Claire Moore, on behalf of The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for Health in June.

The centre will extend St Andrew's Toowoomba Hospital's culture of caring by providing the most comprehensive diagnostic, treatment and patient support cancer care program in regional Australia. Given the hospital's emphasis on coordinated care, patients will have a care-giving team comprised of their primary care general practitioner, specialists, nurses and support staff. Patients will have access to more oncologists and haematologists, double the number of current treatment stations, more advanced radiation technology, more specialised cancer care services and a caring nursing team who will guide them through the entire, and often overwhelming, cancer care process.

The Cancer Care Centre offers a range of radiation therapy and medical oncology treatment combinations under the one roof. This world-class facility, with technology equal to any machine in the world, is operated by highly qualified and experienced cancer specialists in medical oncology and radiation oncology services. Patients are provided with a comprehensive planning set up, and treatment is delivered in a quiet, efficient and accurate manner by a team of caring professionals. The centre treats both private and public outpatients.

The research centre associated with the Cancer Care Centre conducts the highest number of cancer clinical trials of any facility in Queensland including metropolitan tertiary facilities.

Professor Michael Poulsen, director of Radiation Oncology Queensland and founding radiation oncologist at the St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre described the growth and expansion of the centre as indicative of the considerable community need.

"St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre is arguably one of the most advanced cancer centres in regional Australia," he said.

Demand for cancer care treatment has continued to grow since the opening of the St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre in May 2007. As part of the federal government's Regional Cancer Centres Initiative, St Andrew's was awarded \$6.8 million from the Department of Health and Ageing to build the centre. Six years later and an additional \$7 million of commonwealth funding brings a doubling in size of the cancer centre.

The expanded service increases the capacity of radiotherapy treatment by more than 70%, effectively minimising any waiting time and allowing patients prompt access to radiotherapy treatment.

The patient catchment area has expanded significantly into regional Queensland and northern New South Wales as more general practitioners are referring patients to this quality facility.

"We have been treating more than 80 patients a day from Eromanga, Rockhampton, Tenterfield, Bundaberg and the Darling Downs. Patients travel from Ipswich rather than tackle traffic in Brisbane. We are pleased to be able to now treat up to 120 patients per day," Professor Poulsen said.

The new linear accelerator installed by Radiation Oncology Queensland (ROQ) is the latest advancement in technology and provides the next level of treatment for patients. The linear accelerator has an inbuilt CT scanner that allows a patient's tumours to be monitored in real time, thereby identifying efficacy of treatment. Additionally the machine is able to monitor the patient's breathing cycle, adjust to movement and target the treatment field more precisely, thereby reducing the radiation impact on surrounding tissue.

"The capacity of the new machine is exceptional, we are now able to monitor the effects of the treatment in real time and target tumour cells with more accuracy, reducing the side effects of treatment," Professor Poulsen said.

In addition to the expansion of radiotherapy,



Prof Michael Poulsen, Director of Radiation Oncology Queensland (ROQ) and Ray Fairweather, CEO of St Andrew's Toowoomba Hospital

the centre has increased the capacity of medical oncology treatment by more than 60%. The newly-designed unit now has 25 treatment stations for patients requiring chemotherapy or infusions.

The new unit increases patient access to treatment, provides patients and their family with more privacy and space and has reduced the unnecessary time patients spend travelling to Brisbane for treatment.

Chief Executive Officer at St Andrew's Toowoomba Hospital Ray Fairweather said the centre brings together health professionals and researchers, with the patient being the central focus, combining the best in clinical excellence, research and treatment programs.

"Seamless coordination of the different phases of cancer treatment including medical and radiation oncology is facilitated by fortnightly head and neck, colorectal, lung and breast multi-disciplinary clinics," Mr Fairweather said.

"Having access to this specialist expertise and advanced technology in Toowoomba is nothing short of amazing. To think that a patient with breast cancer can have a mammogram and diagnostic assessment at St Andrew's Breast

Centre, be seen by a specialist breast surgeon and, if needed, receive chemotherapy and radiotherapy without having to travel to Brisbane, is so valuable for the patient and family."

Mr Fairweather stated that the St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre has made a significant difference to patients' quality of life.

"When you see patients attend the radiotherapy unit for what can be a five-minute treatment, you realise how significant it is to have a service close to home. Six years ago, patients were travelling four-to-five hours round trip to Brisbane daily, or up to three times a week for a five-minute treatment. This takes its toll on your health and your pocket and is the last thing you feel like doing when you are unwell.

"Patients tell us the service is making such a difference to their treatment. Patients who live in Toowoomba can be in and out of here for radiation therapy in a very short time and go back to work on the same day if they want to," Mr Fairweather said.

"With the accessibility of treatment for the rural community, we are seeing more men following through on treatment and a significant increase in the number of patients with prostate cancer." 

By Louise Cuskelly



Official Opening of the St Andrew's Cancer Care Centre
L to R: Honorable Ian Macfarlane MP, Mr John Rowe, Chairman, St Andrew's Hospital Board, Senator Claire Moore