

# Newsletter

## Volume 21 – September 2018

[www.stgeorgescancerinstitute.co.nz](http://www.stgeorgescancerinstitute.co.nz)



**ST GEORGE'S**  
CANCER INSTITUTE  
(Registered Charitable Trust)

### Greetings

On our way to warmer weather I hope, perhaps not as hot as our Northern hemisphere counterparts.

Chris Atkinson gave a very good interview, as Medical Director of Lung Foundation NZ, on TV1 breakfast a few weeks ago. He was talking about the unfunded drug Keytruda, which is set to revolutionise lung cancer treatment.

Lung cancer kills four times more people than road accidents and kills more New Zealanders than breast cancer, melanoma and prostate cancer combined.

The Institute would like to assist with more funding for patients who can't afford it – perhaps a good option for another fundraiser!

The HexaPOD™ six degrees of freedom stereotactic couch purchased by the St George's Institute Equipment Trust and leased to St George's Cancer Care has already treated several patients with spinal tumours.

Here's to a warm spring and lots of great outcomes from St George's Cancer Care.

**Cilla Glasson**  
Chair, Cancer Institute Trustees Limited and Fundraising Committee

### Spinal stereotactic programme update

The HexaPOD™ couch is now fully commissioned and being used daily to enhance patient treatments (not just those who are to have stereotactic treatments).



Our spine stereotactic programme is progressing well, and we have treated our first case, with another two in the pipeline. The first case was

treated for Christchurch Hospital (CDHB) at no cost thanks to St George's Cancer Institute, St George's Hospital Inc, and St George's Cancer Care.

The introduction of this programme has taken a lot of hard work and commitment from a dedicated team. This involved specialised training in Toronto, Canada for one of our radiation therapists, a physicist and two oncologists.

Spinal stereotactic treatment cases are first presented at a special multidisciplinary meeting that includes surgeons, oncologists, radiologists, and others. Once it has been recommended the patient receive this highly specialised treatment they will undergo a planning procedure involving MRI and CT scans. The team of oncologists, radiation therapists and physicists then spend many hours designing the best possible plan and doing quality assurance checks prior to treatment delivery. All the planning procedures can take a couple of weeks to complete and then there are usually two treatments – one each day for two days.

Thank you again to the St George's Cancer Institute for enabling us to acquire the HexaPOD™ couch for the delivery of this specialised treatment programme. This will benefit patients in Canterbury who would not otherwise have this available to them locally.

**Viv Ali**  
Practice Manager, St George's Cancer Care

### Integration with Pacific Radiology Group

Pacific Radiology Christchurch, formerly Christchurch Radiology Group has a close and long standing relationship St George's Cancer Care. Medical imaging is involved in the diagnosis, staging, treatment planning and follow up of many types of cancer.

Following a diagnosis of cancer, accurate assessment of the extent of tumour spread is usually required to stage the cancer to determine appropriate treatment options. Pacific Radiology offers Xray, ultrasound, CT, MRI and PET/CT, providing comprehensive cancer imaging assessment. PET/CT combines anatomical and metabolic information and is the most accurate imaging technique for staging many types of cancer. PET (positron emission tomography) utilises positron emitting isotopes, the most commonly used agent being FDG (fluorodeoxyglucose) where a carbon atom on a glucose molecule is substituted for radioactive fluorine. FDG accumulates in tissues that are metabolizing glucose, glucose being the main source of energy for most cancer cell types. Sodium fluoride can be used to detect cancer spread in bones and PSMA is specific marker for prostate carcinoma.

Pacific Radiology also offers interventional radiology services, including biopsy for defining cancer cell type, venous access for chemotherapy, needle directed thermal ablation of cancers, drainage procedures for fluid collections or blockages of kidneys or bile ducts, and procedures to help with pain management and other complications of cancer.

Radiologists can also help radiation oncologists with radiotherapy planning.

Our close working relationship with Pacific Radiology helps us optimise cancer management for our patients.

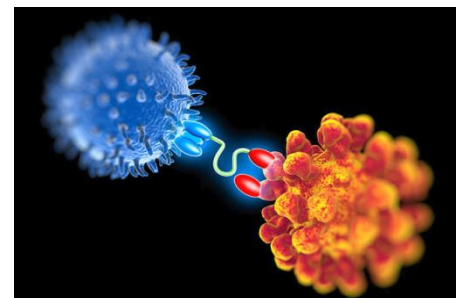
**Andrew Laing**  
Radiologist, Pacific Radiology Christchurch and Director, St George's Cancer Institute Trustees Ltd

### Innovative drug treatments

**Fact:** Currently about 20% of patients on drug therapy at St George Cancer Care are having medications like Keytruda (Pembrolizumab), that may not be funded in the public system for their clinical scenario. It is good for patients that they can receive these unfunded treatments at our Centre.

Unfortunately, the cost of many of these drugs can be thousands of dollars per month which makes funding treatment a daunting prospect for

many. Sometimes the drug company will provide the drug free of charge after it is shown to be working for the patient. The side effect of 'financial toxicity' is therefore real for many cancer patients and their whānau.



**Chris Atkinson**  
Radiation Oncologist, St George's Cancer Care  
Director, St George's Cancer Institute Trustees Ltd

