



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

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newsletter

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2022. Omicron is certainly having an impact on our lives – let's hope its impact will be quick and we can get on with life as we knew it (or close to it).

St George's Cancer Care continued to treat patients during the Christmas and New Year period, and we have a great team of oncologists and support teams working in the Centre.

Last year the St George's Cancer Institute farewelled Dr Chris Atkinson and Dr Chris Wynne as Directors of the Institute who, without their initiative, the Centre would not have started 12 years ago. They have been

a wonderful asset in making the Centre what it is today.

Good news is that the construction of the new bunker is well underway for our impressive new MR linear accelerator. This is a great example of the Institute advancing new innovations and technologies into New Zealand. It is hoped, barring any more lockdowns to be installed in October 2022 and up and running early next year.

The Institute has committed to pay \$12 million towards two new linear accelerators – the MR and a replacement standard linear accelerator. Thanks to everyone who

has contributed to the fundraising. The MR machine will be able to treat many pancreatic and liver cancers, which will make a huge difference to outcomes.

To continue being able to support patients, I have been nicely asked to try and raise another million dollars. All our accumulated funds have been absorbed with the purchase of the new linear accelerators. Any support you provide would be very much appreciated.

Wishing you all a better 2022 once the Omicron outbreak settles down.

Cilla Glasson

*Chair, St George's Cancer Institute
Board of Directors*

New partnership at St George's Cancer Care

A group of highly regarded Christchurch oncologists have partnered with St George's Hospital in a new joint venture with St George's Cancer Care.

Since opening in 2010, St George's Cancer Care has operated as a joint venture partnership between St George's Hospital and two oncologists, Dr Chris Atkinson and Dr Chris Wynne from Southern Oncology Associates Limited.

With the prior joint venture concluded, Dr Wynne has left St George's Cancer Care to focus on clinical research, while Dr Atkinson is still seeing patients at St George's Cancer Care. They both played a key



Left to right: new Joint Venture partners – Brendon Anderson, Avtar Raina, Ben Hindson, Michelle Vaughan, Jim Edwards, Kate Gardner

role in establishing the facility as the South Island's cancer centre of excellence, and the new joint venture partners will continue to build on their success.

The new joint venture partners are six oncologists from Cancer Specialists

Aotearoa Limited. The group was attracted to St George's Cancer Care because of its integrated treatment approach and continued investment in cutting edge technology.

Patient treatment and support will continue uninterrupted.



About the MR Linear Accelerator Project

An important, ongoing development in the St George's Cancer Care – The Glasson Centre, is the construction of the bunker for our new MR linear accelerator. The advanced technology of this machine makes use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to get an even clearer and more accurate image compared to our existing technology. These images obtained before and during the delivery of radiation allows the team to more precisely target the cancer cells and destroy them.

The new imaging modality will make it possible to decrease the margin around the tumour, reducing the toxicity to the normal tissue and allowing an increase in the daily radiation dose to the tumour. This means that a patient could reduce their number of daily treatment visits from 24 to about 2 or 3. The MRI functionality also enables the team to visualise and treat tumours that could not have been safely treated



previously. The better imaging and the resulting increase in accuracy means that we will be able to treat many pancreatic and liver cancers, a huge milestone for St George's and of course our patients.

Construction of the bunker is likely to be completed by October, followed by five months of installation, commissioning and training, aiming to have the first patient treated in April 2023 (providing no further delays with COVID-19).

Blair Roxborough, CEO of St George's Hospital says, "Our vision for St George's Cancer Care is to be recognised as the Centre of Excellence for cancer services. The introduction of the Elekta Unity MR linear accelerator holds true to the vision".

We are lucky to have fantastic staff working on the MR linear accelerator implementation team and we have profiled two members of the team below. They will assist in the set-up and testing of the Unity machine and continue to operate it once patient treatments begin.

It has been a long journey to purchase this leading edge technology and build the bunker where it will live. While the Institute has fully paid for the new machines (an MR linear accelerator and a replacement standard linear accelerator), some help is needed to provide supporting equipment that will allow them to be utilised to their full potential.

"The Elekta Unity MR linear accelerator at St George's Cancer Care will be the first in New Zealand, and our clinical team is excited about the enhancement in radiation therapy treatments that can be delivered to the people of Canterbury and New Zealand."



Architect's image of St George's Cancer Care bunker 3 building

New roles for our new MR technology



ALLI COPLAND

Radiation Therapist Clinical Team Leader

Alli has recently been appointed as the Radiation Therapist Clinical Team Leader role at St George's Cancer Care.

Alli began her career at the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB). She then spent a year in Switzerland and four years in Scotland working as a Radiation Therapist, before returning to the CDHB in 2011 as a Treatment Supervisor Radiation Therapist.

Alli joined St George's Cancer Care in 2020 and has held Treatment Specialist and Treatment Supervisor roles prior to the Team Leader role.

Alli is an active board member on a number of health-related

organisations, including the Cancer Society of New Zealand (Canterbury and West Coast division).

Being part of a dynamic and progressive team at St George's is important to Alli.

"This new technology will allow us to acquire an MRI scan before and during the treatment to guide the radiation beam. Our MR linear accelerator is a fantastic world class advancement to be able to offer our patients".



AILBHE PORTER

Medical Physicist

Ailbhe joined the St George's medical physics team at the beginning of 2022, ahead of the arrival of the new Elekta Unity MR linear accelerator machine.

Having a huge interest in medical physics, Ailbhe completed a Master

of Science in Medical Physics at St Luke's Radiation Oncology Network in Dublin, Ireland. This advanced qualification led her to secure a spot on the Institute of Physicists and Engineers in Medicine (IPEM) accredited training scheme in London. Ailbhe trained and worked at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London for six years, until moving to New Zealand in June 2020, spending the first 18 months of her time in New Zealand at the Canterbury District Health Board.

Throughout Ailbhe's career, she has been involved in the commissioning and quality assurance of many linear accelerators, including maintaining the traceability of dosimetry to primary standards, treatment planning, and the education of medical physics trainees.

"Bringing MR into the radiotherapy department is new and with it will bring a set of challenges, but the reward will be knowing we are operating a piece of equipment that is at the forefront of technology and will help so many of our patients."

