



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

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# newsletter

## **Can't say I am a big winter fan and hopefully spring comes quickly.**

The construction of the new bunker for our state-of-the-art MR linear accelerator is well underway and (given the current environment) surprisingly on time for completion in early October. Once the bunker is complete, the MR linear accelerator starts arriving on site from October and a 5–6 month installation and commissioning programme commences. We will be treating the first patients early April next year – very exciting!

As I have said before, this new technology will be able to treat

many liver and pancreatic cancers with extreme accuracy and without damaging other organs. In May, six of our team, including oncologists, radiation therapists and physicists visited Australia where there are several of these machines. They had the opportunity to observe the machine in action and participate in education sessions on the machine operation and treatment outcomes. This was the first time since lockdowns etc that they were able to travel so this was a great milestone given the MR linear accelerator is more complex than our current CT linear accelerators.

It is exciting and also wonderful to be getting the first MR linear accelerator in New Zealand, with only 100 worldwide.

We are looking at visiting several towns in the South Island to talk and update groups on the comprehensive services offered at St George's Cancer Care. Hopefully Wanaka in October where we always get a great reception.

Keep warm, stay safe and roll on the warmer weather.

### **Cilla Glasson**

*Chair, Cancer Institute Trustees  
Limited Board of Directors*

## *New General Manager for St George's Cancer Care Centre*

### **Caroline Stark has taken up the new position of General Manager of St George's Cancer Care Centre.**

"The Centre has gone through a period of significant growth and my task is to make sure the patients are still at the forefront of our service and we've got the infrastructure to ensure a positive patient experience," Caroline says.

"The team has done a great job in managing growth over the last few years. Now the focus is on consolidating and ensuring we have got the best services, structures, and processes to support the patient through their journey."



*St George's Cancer Care Centre new  
General Manager Caroline Stark*

Caroline Stark has joined what is now the largest private provider of cancer care services in the South Island, bringing a wealth of health management skills and experience with her. Her previous experience includes general management across a range of health services including integrating health services across secondary care and allied health in addition to leading primary and acute care services in New Zealand and Australia.

"There is a very engaged, passionate team here at the Cancer Care Centre and we are all committed to delivering high quality patient care and ensuring the ongoing success of the Centre," Caroline says.

Future planning is high on Caroline's agenda and she will be working closely with the six oncologists who provide services, and are in partnership with the St George's Hospital Cancer Care Centre's joint venture.



*Construction is underway on the new St George's Cancer Care bunker*

## *Bunker on track*

**Construction is well on track for the bunker that will house the new MR linear accelerator (MR Linac) at St George's Cancer Care Centre. The building itself is a technological and construction feat in its own right and was designed with input from radiation experts.**

About the size of a small office building, the bunker is due for completion in October 2022. After it is handed over to the Cancer Care Centre, it will take around five months of specialist time and expertise to install and commission the linear accelerator.

This is the first MR Linac to be installed in New Zealand and will join the Centre's existing two linear accelerators.

The visualisation of some types of cancer confined within the soft tissue can be extremely challenging with the current technology. The MR Linac, because it combines a conventional linear accelerator with an MRI imaging system, allows for a much more accurate localisation of these tumours. It will improve the radiation coverage of the target while minimising the dose to surrounding organs at risk. This will help reduce the side effects for patients. In some



*Architect's image of new St George's Cancer Care bunker*

***This is the first MR Linac to be installed in New Zealand and will join the Centre's existing two linear accelerators.***

instances, we can even expect to be able to treat cancers that would have not been suitable for radiation treatment previously.

The MR Linac is currently making its way to New Zealand from Europe,

and it is due for installation and commissioning in early 2023.

"The MR Linac is a major milestone in term of treatment modality," according to Jerome Gastaldo, Chief Physicist at the Cancer Care Centre.

"It gives us one more tool in our fight against cancer. Over the past two years, leading research centres around the world have demonstrated that the MR Linac offers significant benefits for some types of cancer treatment. The coming years will confirm this trend and St George's Cancer Care Centre is proud to be part of this journey."



# Linear accelerator update

**The St George's Cancer Care Centre's first two linear accelerators were installed in time for the Centre's opening in 2010. Since then, they've both had upgraded features installed – the Hexapod Couch installed on one and the Agility Multileaf Collimator system on both.**

The Hexapod Couch allows small adjustments of the patient's body in all dimensions (referred to as six degrees of freedom) before the treatment beam is delivered.

The Agility Collimator system increases the precision of the radiation beams, ultimately improving the radiation treatment.

With the passage of time and ever-increasing technology advances, the Cancer Institute made the decision to purchase two new linear accelerators – an MR and a CT linear accelerator.

This ensures that St George's Cancer Care Centre maintains its position as the centre of excellence for cancer treatment in New Zealand.

All major purchases of leading edge technology require a great deal of planning and fundraising. The Institute is always looking ahead to see what new technologies are emerging, how they might benefit the Centre and how funds can be raised to buy them.

Every donation – no matter how large or small – helps to support our work and to ensure St George's Cancer Care Centre provides the highest quality treatment and care to patients.

## Dealing with the emotional challenges

**Psychological support is available to all patients at St George's Cancer Care Centre, as well as their families.**

This support is available free of charge, with the cost being met by the St George's Cancer Institute.

Ginny Eggleston (Consultant Clinical Psychologist), Sue Corkill (Counsellor) and Dr Jessica Mills (Clinical Psychologist) are available to meet with patients who need support as they come to terms with their diagnosis or deal with the impact of their treatment.

"We are here not just for the patient, but for their family as well," Ginny says. "Sometimes we don't even see the patient."

"We are most likely to see patients around the time of their diagnosis, when their treatment is being planned and at the end of treatment, as they catch up with what has happened and adjust to life after their treatment."

"They may only come once, however when they leave, they know they can always come back if they need to."

Ginny says patients may already be dealing with other issues in their



*Consultant Clinical Psychologist Ginny Eggleston*

lives and adding a cancer diagnosis to the mix means they are more likely to benefit from psychological and emotional support.

Patients and their partners may seek guidance on how to talk to and support their children. Ginny and her colleagues tend to support parents to help them find ways to support their young children, and they may meet with older adolescent and young adult children.

She says COVID has made life harder for cancer patients, including changing the way they have accessed appointments.

"It's just been one more thing for them to deal with," she says.

Psychological support has been available throughout COVID, with appointments being offered online or by phone, however some patients chose to wait until they could see someone face to face in the relaxed and friendly environment of the Cancer Care Centre.

Ginny says she doesn't know of any other private cancer care provider in New Zealand providing free psychological support to patients and their families. "It is a unique aspect as far as I am aware. The psychology team feels proud to be a part of St George's Cancer Care Centre where such a breadth of supportive care is available to patients."

