

POSITION STATEMENT

Radiotherapy Services

Issue

Treatment with radiotherapy is a major part of cancer treatment, whether part of potentially curative treatment, or for palliative purposes. Access to public radiotherapy services in rural and remote areas is often difficult, time consuming and costly. Some centres can only offer private facilities, disadvantaging those who cannot afford to pay the associated high costs. NSW needs to adopt Radiation Oncology Practice Standards, across the state and in public and private sectors.

Background

Currently only about 36% of newly diagnosed cancer patients in NSW receive radiotherapy despite radiation oncologists and the NSW Cancer Institute considering that the minimum should be 52% (the internationally accepted benchmark). This benchmark is recognised in NSW Government policy as set out in *Optimising Cancer Care in NSW (2003)*.

Many cancer patients would benefit from being included in a radiotherapy trial. This would mean patients would receive treatment free of charge (a major financial benefit to patients) and close monitoring. Involvement in radiotherapy trials is often not offered by oncologists to patients. This may be due to a lack of easily accessible radiotherapy facilities. (See Trans Tasman Radiation Oncology website www.trog.com.au.)

Present Position

The previous federal government increased or built radiotherapy facilities at a number of cancer centres which made access by rural and remote cancer patients considerably easier in those areas. However, some remain unserved.

There remains a need to ensure that patients receiving treatment at cancer centres have access to suitable and affordable accommodation located nearby to the facility, as well as any necessary transport assistance.

CVN has recommended action on this to the NSW Minister for Health and her Ministry.

Recommendations

- NSW Government to plan for further investment in public radiotherapy facilities to improve accessibility across the state over the next 10-20 years to match population and cancer diagnosis increases.
- NSW Government to adopt Radiation Oncology Practice Standards (RANZCR 2011), following lead by Queensland. This would ensure services of equal quality throughout the state.
- Radiation Oncologists should consider, in conjunction with their patients, whether the patient might benefit from inclusion in a radiotherapy trial.
- Radiotherapy facilities must be accompanied by suitable affordable accommodation for patients undergoing treatment, since radiotherapy is not a one off treatment. Additionally, there should be adequate financial assistance via IPTAAS to assist with travel costs to these facilities.
- If faced with using private radiotherapy facilities, patients should request a quote of the likely gap cost of treatment, and if this is considered excessive, they should request referral to a public radiotherapy facility.
- Patients holding health care or pension cards should investigate whether they can access bulk billing at private radiotherapy facilities. If not, then they should request referral to a public facility.

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