



MEDIA RELEASE 14 JANUARY 2010.

Radiotherapy machine not feasible at NWRH.

AMA Tasmania welcomes the news that both major parties support an expansion of cancer services in North-West Tasmania.

However, the establishment of a linear accelerator at the North-West Regional Hospital should not be an element of any such proposal.

It is not just that linear accelerators are complex machines that are expensive to install and maintain. The major difficulty will be the recruitment and retention of the highly specialised staff necessary to implement and maintain the service. Such a service requires radiation oncologists, specialised nurses, radiation therapists, engineers, medical physicists and other technical staff. All of these personnel are in short supply in Australia.

There is no precedent in Australia for the establishment of a linear accelerator to service a population of 100,000. Both radiation oncology services established at the Holman Clinics in Hobart and Launceston cater for populations of close to 250,000. As a result, each of these units has adequate staffing with two linear accelerators and a third is planned for both units.

Single machine units are in operation in Victoria. One unit in the Latrobe Valley provides radiotherapy services for a population of 250,000. The service is bedevilled by ongoing staffing difficulties and the clinical outcomes are not as good as those achieved in metropolitan Melbourne.

We should learn from this experience and not risk the health of cancer sufferers in the North-West of the State. All patients with a cancer diagnosis deserve access to high quality and sustainable oncology services.

Clinical oncology services are currently provided at the North-West Regional Hospital and it would make much more sense to better support these, including improvements to outpatient chemotherapy services.

For those patients in the North-West who require radiotherapy, access to the existing services at the Holman clinics in Launceston or Hobart should be optimized. Regular transport services and high-quality accommodation should be available for those patients (and those nearest to them) whose treatment courses may require them to be away from home for several weeks.

END. For further comment: Dr C Middleton. President AMA Tasmania. Mob: 0408130449.