

HOSPITALS AND GOVERNMENT COME TOGETHER FOR 'GROUND-BREAKING' FOR CANADA'S FIRST PORTABLE RADIATION UNIT

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Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in collaboration with Royal Victoria Hospital with funding support from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Cancer Care Ontario were part of a 'ground-breaking' to introduce Canada's first portable radiation unit that will enhance treatment for cancer patients in the Simcoe-Muskoka region.

The portable radiation unit is a self-contained radiation therapy facility with a shielded vault room and can be constructed in a week to allow for installation and commissioning of high-technology radiotherapy equipment such as a linear accelerator. The unit will be temporarily set up at Royal Victoria Hospital - until the new Simcoe-Muskoka Regional Cancer Centre is fully operational - to provide radiation treatment to referred patients in the region beginning in February 2008.



Premier Dalton McGuinty meeting (left to right) Dr. Jacqueline Spayne, Radiation Oncologist, and Bryn Hamilton, Radiation Therapist, both from the Odette Cancer Centre.

"There is a lot of worry for patients at the initial stage of diagnosis. Having the opportunity to meet with radiation oncologists right there at the local oncology clinic, and in the future to have on-site radiation treatment at the portable unit goes a long way to reducing a patient's anxiety. Consultations in the clinic also help patients understand multidisciplinary treatment decisions up front. For the physicians, this collaboration facilitates stronger sharing of information across all dimensions of the patient's treatment plan," says Dr. Jacqueline Spayne, lead radiation oncologist, Odette Cancer Centre, who together with other Sunnybrook radiation oncologists has been attending over the past eight months a multidisciplinary breast clinic based at Royal Victoria Hospital and participating by videoconference in regular multidisciplinary tumour boards where the care of patients with more complex breast cancer is discussed by all specialists involved.

"As North America's sixth largest comprehensive cancer centre, part of our role is to help other regional cancer centres get established. Odette Cancer Centre at Sunnybrook is pleased to be a part of ongoing, innovative community-based collaborations," says Dr. Linda Rabeneck, vice president, Regional Cancer Services, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and chief, Odette Cancer Centre. "We are excited about partnering with others in the community to help improve cancer care. I would like to acknowledge the terrific work of our staff who are committed to both caring for patients coming through our doors and caring for patients in communities across the province."

Currently, an inter-professional radiation oncology team from the Odette Cancer Centre including radiation oncologists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and medical physicists is collaborating with Royal Victoria Hospital to develop an on-site radiation program. Once the portable unit opens, Sunnybrook radiation program staff will be delivering radiation treatment services.

"This collaboration helps provide greater regional capacity to continue to improve access, and bring high quality comprehensive cancer care closer to home for patients," says Terrence Sullivan, PhD, president and chief executive officer, Cancer Care Ontario. "Partnerships like this one are critical as more new cancer centres get up and running in the coming years."

Of today's 'ground-breaking', Janice Skot president and chief executive officer, Royal Victoria Hospital says, "This portable radiation facility at Royal Victoria Hospital will have a positive and immediate impact on cancer patients and their families. It's one more step in developing a comprehensive, regional cancer program."

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