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Media Release

NSW Audit Office confirms shortfall in radiotherapy services

The Audit Office of NSW says significant improvements are needed when providing radiotherapy services to combat the rising incidence of cancer.

In its report "Tackling Cancer with Radiotherapy", the Audit Office examined whether patients have reasonable access to radiotherapy services, the location and staffing of radiotherapy centres and the use of current funding.

"I'm concerned that there's no 10 year strategic plan for radiotherapy services across the state," said the Deputy Auditor-General Tony Whitfield.

"Over that period, the Cancer Institute NSW predicts the incidence of the disease will rise by 30%, meaning by 2016, there will be an estimated 45,000 cases diagnosed each year," Mr Whitfield said.

The report found that based on NSW Health targets only around 70% of cancer patients deemed suitable for radiotherapy are actually receiving it - a finding echoed by an investigation by the Cancer Council NSW last month.

The Audit Office's report makes a number of recommendations including:

- improve waiting times by developing centralised booking systems
- ensure patients faced with extended waiting times are offered access to other radiotherapy centres
- alleviate the need for new centres by considering extending existing centres operating hours (including Saturday mornings)
- reassess staffing levels at radiotherapy centres around the state
- develop and implement a credible 10 year plan for radiotherapy services across NSW.

The report identified the Central Coast, Hunter New England and Illawarra Shoalhaven areas as those most in need of more radiotherapy services.

Radiation treatment is delivered via linear accelerators which cost between \$3.5 and \$5-million each. NSW has a total of 43 publicly and privately funded machines. The Audit Office found the number of linear accelerators per 1000 cancer patients in NSW is comparable to those in other similar sized states and countries.

The Audit Office paid tribute to the medical and allied health staff who provide radiotherapy services saying it was most impressed by their dedication and efforts in providing care for those dealing with cancer.

Further Information

For a full copy of the report or to arrange an interview please contact Sandra Tavares on (02) 9275 7108 or email at sandra.tavares@audit.nsw.gov.au

The full report is available on the Audit Office website.