

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST PRIVATE RADIATION THERAPY TREATMENT CENTRE OPENS IN AUCKLAND**

New Zealand's first private radiation therapy centre, Auckland Radiation Oncology (ARO), opens for business in Auckland today.

ARO is a joint venture between MercyAscot and Southern Cross Hospitals. The centre provides a private treatment option for cancer patients requiring radiation therapy, and complements the existing public system.

"We know from the volume of initial enquiries we've had so far that there is strong demand for this kind of service," comments ARO chairman Dr Andrew Wong.

Dr Wong says that the centre will now start treatment planning for its first few patients. ARO expects to treat between 450-500 patients a year initially, rising to 750-800 per year in the medium term.

"We intend to build up treatment numbers gradually over the next few months to ensure the whole system works smoothly," he explains.

He adds ARO has the most modern equipment of its type in New Zealand. The new facility forms a key part of a comprehensive grouping of services focused on the treatment of cancer. It is close to operating theatres, radiology, laboratory, consulting suites, chemotherapy, pharmacy, pre and post treatment care, a 78-seat cafeteria and ample parking for patients.

The new 1,000 sq m, two-level, purpose-built facility at MercyAscot's Mountain Road, Epsom site will house two linear accelerators (radiation therapy machines) initially with space for a further two machines later depending on demand.

Dr Wong says the new ARO centre will treat mainly prostate and breast cancers.

"We will provide not only great service and fast access to care but also the latest in advanced technology for treating cancer," he says.

ARO has installed a new Elekta Synergy® radiation therapy system with MOSAIQ™ electronic medical records – the first such system in New Zealand.

Dr Wong says ARO chose the Elekta system for several reasons.

"Elekta Synergy technology provides advanced methods for treating cancer tumours using integrated, high-resolution X-ray technology to address two significant issues in modern radiation therapy: internal organ motion and errors in patient set-up.

"The result is improved clinical confidence, enabling more aggressive treatment of tumours while minimising damage to surrounding healthy tissue," he explains.

ARO patients will be provided an estimate of costs for their planned treatment prior to their first appointment. Patients with health insurance may be able to cover their treatment costs through their plans.

Leading cancer specialist, Professor Chelleraj Benjamin, ONZM has been appointed clinical director of ARO. He has previously been the clinical director of radiation oncology at Auckland City Hospital. He was named an Officer New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2008 New Year's Honours list for his services to medicine and the community.

To find more information go to [aro.co.nz](http://aro.co.nz)

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**Additional information:**

Auckland Radiation Oncology is a joint venture owned and operated by MercyAscot and Southern Cross Hospitals. ARO will be located on the MercyAscot Epsom site. The purchase of the linear accelerators, the leasing of the site, and the ongoing business operation are being funded through the joint venture.