Funds secured to build radiotherapy unit in Hereford and end cancer treatment ‘misery miles’ by 2013

Herefordshire is to get a new, purpose-built radiotherapy unit – ending the ‘misery miles’ for cancer patients who currently need to travel to Cheltenham General Hospital for this life-saving treatment.

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has successfully bid for additional NHS funds to design, build, staff and manage a new £7.7-million satellite radiotherapy facility at Hereford Hospital.

Local groups and individuals, as well as the council, the primary care trust and the hospital, have all campaigned for the solution throughout the last decade.

The 3 Counties Cancer Network, which incorporates all cancer services in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and South Worcestershire, identified the need to provide radiotherapy treatment locally in 2004, and finished a feasibility study in July 2008. The unit is expected to be operational by April 2013, and will be linked to the Gloucestershire Oncology Centre in Cheltenham.

Space for the concrete bunkers to house the linear accelerator, which provides the radiation treatment, has already been allocated as an extension to the new Macmillan Renton chemotherapy unit, which is currently under construction at Hereford County Hospital. The radiotherapy unit will share car parking, patient entrance and reception but will be outside the public finance initiative. The capital costs would be funded by a loan from the NHS bank, to be paid back over ten years – the lifespan of a linear accelerator machine.

The new Hereford centre will provide thousands of treatment sessions a year for the majority of patients. A small percentage of patients will still have to travel to Cheltenham for more specialised treatments and to gain the added benefit of the expertise from a centralised clinical team. All patients will travel to Cheltenham for their initial treatment planning session. Patients from other primary care trusts that live reasonably close to Hereford could also choose to receive their treatment in Hereford.

Dr Frank Harsent, chief executive of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "I am delighted that we have been successful in our application for funding for this long-desired development in cancer services. This satellite radiotherapy service in Hereford will bring cancer services closer to the homes of many patients who live in that area and will mean that many people receiving radiotherapy won’t have to make the long journey that they..."
currently have to make at a time when they are feeling unwell. It is an improvement all round for patients.

“The project has shown real partnership working for the benefit of patients and their families, between ourselves, NHS Herefordshire, Hereford County Hospital, the 3 Counties Cancer Network and local people”.

Chris Bull, chief executive of NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council, said: “The news that funding has been secured means the new radiotherapy service is now becoming a reality for Herefordshire. For some patients in Herefordshire, the journey time to the Oncology Centre in Cheltenham, which has been an ordeal lasting more than two hours in one direction, will be considerably reduced. The development of a satellite service in Hereford will be welcomed by hundreds of individuals and their families, as well as GPs and clinicians who want the best for their patients”.

Martin Woodford, chief executive of Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust, commented: “Hereford Hospital is preparing for the new Macmillan Renton Unit for chemotherapy to come on stream soon and it is fantastic news that the new satellite radiotherapy unit will add to that service in two years time, delivering significant benefit to patients in Herefordshire”.

Herefordshire Council leader Roger Phillips added: “This is excellent news for the many campaigners and healthcare professionals who have lobbied hard in partnership for our county to have its own centre for cancer treatment”.

Ends

For further information, call the communications unit on 01432 260006