

## UPMC New Methods Aid Cancer Treatment In South-East

**Jordan Norris**

Cancer patients in Waterford and across the south-east have received a welcome boost over the past weeks with news of a new advanced radio surgery system available at the Bons Secour Cork Cancer Centre.

Cancer patients with difficult-to-reach brain, spine, lung and other tumours are now benefitting from one of the world's most advanced stereotactic radio surgery systems at Bons Secours Radiotherapy Cork in partnership with UPMC Hillman Cancer Centre.

Paul Kelly, Medical Director of the new radiation oncology facility, spoke with the Munster Express on the benefit of the service to Waterford patients, allowing them to be treated for cancer but keep their dignity:

“By means of HyperArc technology, we can treat up to ten tumours in a targeted way all at the same time, in under half an hour. Previously, patients had whole brain radiation with the side effects of significant fatigue, memory issues and hair loss that are not associated with stereotactic radio-surgery systems to the same extent. We can now deliver treatment in between one and three sessions, whereas before it would have been on an every day basis for a number of weeks.”

Stereotactic treatment has been available since the late 1980s, but new technology has further enhanced its ability to suppress and directly treat aggressive cancers. The treatment formally involved fixing a frame into the patient's skull, but now a mask is all that is required. Up until the opening of the Cork centre, the treatment type was not available outside of Dublin.

“The ability to plan your treatment on one day and receive your treatment on another in a place that's local to people is huge because, in a previous role at Cork University Hospital I used to have to advise people to go to Dublin for treatment. Now, that treatment is available close to home.”

The logistics of travel and the boundaries around it have often left cancer patients medically compromised and unwilling to avail of treatment. Kelly hopes that this new centre will see an upsurge in treatment and recovery:

“Even from a personal perspective, the ability to deliver this locally is quite gratifying. People with limited life expectancies often find their time quite important to them and are unwilling to spend prolonged periods travelling for treatment, these barriers to the right treatment are now hopefully gone. As radiotherapy centres update their machines in years to come, this type of treatment will become more widespread.”

“Even if the end result with this treatment may not be a cure, the fact that people are living better and maintaining their dignity throughout treatment is a major development. There's less attachment to hospitals, outside of that time the person's time is their own to live their lives how they so choose.”

Kelly notes that everyday people often tend to consider those suffering from cancer as quite sick and physically weak. However, he says from experience at his clinic, some people are suffering from cancer but working full-time still while receiving treatment. These technologies permit people to go about their daily lives as was not previously possible.

The side-effects of traditional treatment have been effectively stifled. The first HyperArc treatment was delivered at the centre

two weeks ago, but the conventional stereotactic treatments have been up and running in Cork with the best part of six months.

“We’ve delivered 37 treatments so far all together. It’s great to see people coming back and watching their tumours shrink away. The response has been really positive. We’ve had patients from Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Waterford.”

Kelly has advised cancer patients with scepticisms to visit hospital amid COVID-19 that they are in one of the safest environments possible.

“It’s a very natural human reaction to not want to go to hospital considering what’s going on. Cancer patients can be vulnerable given that treatment can affect their immune system, but the procedures have completely changed since COVID. Consultations can be done over the phone and virtually to ease fears, we will always accommodate any anxieties and do our utmost in practices to curb the spread of the virus.”