



**Prof Robyn Ward**  
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Dear Professor Ward

**Availability of IMRT and IGRT to Australian cancer patients: MSAC April Agenda**

Cancer Voices Australia notes that the following two items are on the 1-2 April MSAC Agenda:

*1182: Intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) in the treatment of cancer*

*1319: Image guided radiation therapy (IGRT) in the treatment of cancer*

We wrote to the Hon Peter Dutton on 24 November 2014 to express our support for both items to be approved for Medicare listing, and trust that our recommendation reached MSAC in time.

We understand that the great majority of radiation oncology departments have linear accelerators which are capable of delivering both these forms of treatment effectively and efficiently but this is not currently recognised in the Medicare listing nor is it currently funded. Without adequate compensation, there is no incentive, especially in private practices, to offer cancer patients the benefits of IMRT and IGRT, yet they are freely accessible in the public system.

**Background**

We recognise that radiation therapy is a highly effective treatment for cancer; it is involved in around 40% of cancer cures. Large numbers of patients with incurable cancer are also palliated with radiation therapy, which greatly improves the quality of remaining life.

**1182: Intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) in the treatment of cancer**

Intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) is an advanced technique for delivering radiation therapy. It uses computer-controlled linear accelerators to deliver precise radiation doses to a malignant tumour. IMRT allows the radiation oncologist to direct a higher radiation dose to the tumour while ensuring a lower dose to healthy areas nearby and important organs such as the spinal cord, salivary glands and the bowel. This is particularly important for the treatment of tumours in critical sites, including brain cancer, head and neck cancer, as well as urinary and anal cancers. IMRT has been shown to improve the survival of cancer sufferers whilst reducing what can be devastating side-effects of treatment such as severe dry mouth, bleeding from the bowel and damage to the jaw bone and precious nerves.

IMRT is a world-class treatment that has already been accepted internationally. In the United Kingdom, a jurisdiction with similarities to the Australian setting, the need to increase utilisation has been strongly supported by the UK Government who in 2012 committed £23 million to a Radiotherapy Innovation Fund. By 2013 IMRT utilisation had risen to 22.3% with expectation of further significant increase. Unfortunately, in Australia the utilisation rate for IMRT is as low as 1 in 10 patients only.

1319: Image guided radiation therapy (IGRT) in the treatment of cancer

Image guided radiation therapy (IGRT) is an integral part of safe and accurate delivery of IMRT. Without IGRT a radiation dose could be delivered to the wrong part of the patient and miss the cancer. In addition, there could be a risk to healthy tissues and critical organs, such as the spinal cord, if IGRT is not used and radiation is given to the essential organs or structures leading to significant side effects. Further, a clinician may use daily imaging to ensure precision of treatment depending on a particular patient, treatment or tumour. IGRT allows for the radiation to be accurately directed to the cancer while accounting for the movement of organs within the patient.

Without MSAC approval, access to these essential and world class treatment options will remain limited. Although Australian public patients are well served by these advances, we are concerned that private providers will find it increasingly hard to offer them, especially at a loss. This becomes a bigger problem as more cancer patients are being treated within the private sector.

We call on the Government to properly reimburse IMRT and IGRT, so it is available for all Australian cancer patients who would benefit.

Yours sincerely



Sally Crossing AM  
Convenor  
10 March 2015

Cancer Voices Australia is the independent, 100% volunteer voice of people affected by cancer, working to improve the cancer experience for Australians, their families and friends. We are active in the areas around diagnosis, information, treatment, research, support, care, survivorship and policy.

To achieve this we work with decision-makers, ensuring the patient perspective is heard.

Cancer Voices has led the cancer consumer movement in Australia since 2000. Its networks work together on national issues identified as important, with consumers working to help others affected by cancer.

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