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For Immediate Release  Ministry of Health Services
2010HSERV0004-000114  BC Cancer Agency
Feb. 1, 2010

INTERIOR GETS BETTER CANCER CARE, CLOSER TO HOME

KELOWNA – A new, state-of-the-art radiation therapy treatment unit and a brachytherapy suite was officially opened today at the BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for the Southern Interior, which will help more patients from the Interior get better cancer care, closer to home.

“British Columbia is recognized as a world-class leader in cancer care,” said Kelowna-Mission MLA Steve Thomson, on behalf of Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon. “The expansion of the BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for Southern Interior will bring the latest advances in cancer care to Kelowna, and will help patients get the care they need without having the additional stress of travelling away from home.”

The new radiation therapy treatment unit and the brachytherapy suite – which will allow oncologists to implant radiation sources directly into or around tumours – represent the completion of the first phase of the Province’s $23.7-million investment in cancer care and treatment in the Southern Interior. The second phase will include the replacement of all four of the centre’s existing radiation therapy machines with new radiation therapy equipment by 2011.

“Once both phases are complete, the more than 2,800 new patients who are treated at this centre each year will have access to these leading-edge therapies, such as IMRT radiation therapy and brachytherapy, right in their communities,” said Ben Stewart, MLA for Westside-Kelowna. “The new enhancements will improve patient care and translate into better outcomes for patients in the Southern Interior.”

“Medical technology is constantly advancing as breakthroughs are discovered,” said Norm Letnick, MLA for Kelowna-Lake Country. “We are pleased to be able to take advantage of these advancements and ensure that the Centre for the Southern Interior will continue providing leading-edge care now and well into the future.”

The first of five new radiation machines is now operational, with the remaining four to be replaced one-by-one, and be operational by 2011. Once all five machines are up-and-running, the centre will increase treatment capacity by approximately 25 per cent. The new machines are capable of providing intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT), a special technique which allows radiation therapy to be delivered in a manner that conforms to a specific tumour shape, while better sparing surrounding tissue.

“The new equipment will significantly increase our capacity to treat more patients in the Interior now and for many years into the future,” said Dr. David Levy, president of the BCCA, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). “We have the potential to treat an additional 500 patients each year when all five machines are operational.”

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The new brachytherapy suite will allow patients to receive their care and treatment at the BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for the Southern Interior for the first time. In the past, fewer patients were able to be treated with brachytherapy and it involved consultation and follow-up at the CSI but the procedure itself was done at the Kelowna General Hospital where limited operating room time was available.

Brachytherapy involves the implantation of radiation sources directly into or around a tumour. This type of treatment is particularly effective for localized prostate and cervical cancer (cancer that has not spread).

“The on-site brachytherapy suite represents a significant expansion in the size and scope of the program,” says Dr. Ivo Olivotto, provincial leader for the BC Cancer Agency’s radiation therapy program. “The Centre for the Southern Interior will be able to meet the needs of Interior residents likely to benefit from brachytherapy. More than 150 brachytherapy procedures will be done in the new suite each year.”

“With this radiation therapy expansion, the BC Cancer Agency will have a network of 28 radiation therapy machines located in five regional centres across the province,” said Wynne Powell, board chair of the PHSA. “We are continuing to build upon one of the country’s best cancer care and treatment systems by investing in advances such as the scheduled completion of the province’s sixth cancer centre in Prince George in 2012.”

The BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for the Southern Interior opened in 1998, and is one of five regional centres that are at the heart of the Agency’s provincial cancer control network. The other centres are located in Vancouver, Victoria, Surrey, and Abbotsford, with a sixth centre scheduled for completion in 2012 in Prince George.

The BC Cancer Agency is committed to reducing the incidence of cancer, reducing the mortality from cancer, and improving the quality of life of those living with cancer. It provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of British Columbia by working with community partners to deliver a range of oncology services, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, research, education, supportive care, rehabilitation and palliative care. The BC Cancer Foundation raises funds to support research and enhancements to patient care at the BC Cancer Agency. [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca).

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