

Govt to Set Up State-Of-The-Art Cancer Treatment Centres

The Government is investing US\$14.5 million in the setting up of two cancer treatment centres, which will be equipped with state-of-the-art equipment, to deliver the most advanced cancer care to Jamaicans.

Funding for the undertaking involves a partnership between the National Health Fund (NHF) and the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education (CHASE) Fund, as well as the generous contributions from the private sector. Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, and representatives of the United States-based Varian Medical Systems, on May 5, signed the contract for the treatment centres, which will be established at the St. Joseph's Hospital in Kingston and the Cornwall Regional Hospital in Montego Bay. They will be outfitted with linear accelerator (LINAC) machines, which are the most modern technology in radiotherapy treatment. They will also contain CT simulator, C-arm mobile X-ray unit, brachytherapy machine with treatment planning system, and related quality assurance equipment. Speaking at the signing ceremony held at the Courtleigh Hotel and Suites in New Kingston, Dr. Ferguson said that the centres represents one of the "biggest investments" by the Government in the provision of equipment and service to the country's health sector. He said the facilities will enable the most vulnerable Jamaicans to access high-quality cancer treatment free of cost. "The equipment will reduce the cost significantly for the most vulnerable in our society, to zero," he said. The Minister said the country will also be able to treat patients in the wider Caribbean and beyond. "Having these linear machines, we must market them to the Caribbean region and the wider North America, in order to deliver the kind of quality care to the people of the region and globally," he pointed out. Vice President of Sales and Operations at Varian Medical Systems, C. Brett Jackson, explained that the advanced radiation therapy is designed to deliver a high dosage of treatment to the cancerous area, while minimising exposure of healthy tissue and critical organs. "It is delivering these beams at 191 control points. Earlier systems might use two or four or eight. So this system has a lot of advantages," he said. "The other advantage is that the delivery time is two minutes. Conventional systems can take 10 or more minutes for a delivery. So, not only does that provide for more patients being treated per day, reducing patient waiting time, but also there are situations where the patient can't remain still for 10 or more minutes such as those who are injured or infants and children. It reduces the chance of motion, which can compromise the quality of the treatment," Mr. Jackson noted further. "You can be proud of Jamaica and the commitment of the Government in providing access to this level of cancer treatment," he added. Varian Medical Systems works to make advanced radiation therapy more generally available in countries around the world. Chairman of the LINAC Steering Committee and Chief Executive Officer of the NHF, Everton Anderson, informed that the first centre is slated to be operational in one year and the second facility will be open in 18 months.