

NEW CANCER CARE HORIZONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A RADIOTHERAPY VISION FOR A CONTINENT



In establishing a partnership to improve the radiation therapy situation in South Africa, Equra Health and Elekta are building a vision to change the radiotherapy landscape for an entire continent.

In April 2013, Equra Health and Elekta entered into a long-term agreement in which Equra Health (Cape Town, South Africa) will acquire at least 15 Elekta radiotherapy systems and associated equipment, and work together to build an advanced facility for training cancer care professionals. In addition to addressing South Africa's need for greater radiotherapy capacity, the Equra Health–Elekta partnership also will look to other African countries, most of which have insufficient or sub-optimal radiotherapy facilities and training, and in some cases none at all.

“Africa is the least developed region worldwide in radiotherapy capabilities,” says Erhardt Korf, Chief Operating Officer at Equra Health, a corporation of 24 private clinics. “This preferred provider partnership will ensure that South Africans, and in time inhabitants of additional African countries, will have access to world class technology and technical and application support.”

Building up South Africa ... and the Continent

Access to radiotherapy in South Africa has been hampered by many factors, including equipment costs, according to Korf. The Elekta-Equra agreement is designed to increase the affordability of radiation therapy technology for Equra Health, which in turn will dramatically increase patient access to these services over the next 10 years.

“It will allow public and private health care sectors to cooperate, which will help reduce waiting lists for treatment and enable patients to receive therapy earlier,” he says. “This will improve outcomes and provide a significant economic benefit for the country as a whole.”

As African countries begin to acquire modern radiotherapy technology, Equra Health, in partnership with Elekta, sees an opportunity to assist them from a training perspective and to accelerate these countries' provision of world class radiation oncology services. The joint training centre – equipped with Elekta radiotherapy solutions – will serve as a focal point of



these efforts.

“The training centre will help address the problem of skilled care, both locally and in the rest of Africa as we move from older machines to the latest Elekta technology. Currently, this type of training requires visits of overseas technical and application specialists to South Africa and other African countries, or sending staff members abroad.”

The training centre will reinforce what Equra Health has already been doing in South Africa, and avail clinics in other African countries of these resources. Equra Health is involved in the full spectrum of cancer care delivery in South Africa, including intensive equipment training, clinical training programmes on advanced radiotherapy techniques, a comprehensive quality assurance and incident reporting and review programme, and – through its strategic alliance partner, the Independent Clinical Oncology Network (ICON) – comprehensive training for family practitioners on all aspects of cancer.

“Our vision is to transfer this knowledge and experience to oncology units in Africa through our envisaged training centre and an active partnership model,” Korf explains. “The training centre will offer theoretical and practical training to qualified cancer management professionals right here on the African continent. In this model, clinical personnel from the African countries could rotate through one or more of the 24 Equra Health units in South Africa, and work with our personnel on identical Elekta equipment they will use in their own centres. The focus is on the skills and systems required by qualified personnel to deliver an efficient, safe and clinically beneficial cancer care service in smaller oncology centres.”

Korf predicts the training facility – scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2014 – will educate over 600 clinical staff and more than 100 administrative staff over five years. ●

For more information

Elekta – elekta.com and Equra Health – equrahealth.co.za