



THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

CONTACT NAME
TELEPHONE
OUR REFERENCE
YOUR REFERENCE

Mr Paul Gibson MP
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



4 August 2010

Dear Mr Gibson

**Examination of Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report
Tackling Cancer with Radiotherapy**

We have reviewed the submission provided by the Department of Health concerning the recommendations in the above performance audit report.

Following tabling of the report we were pleased that the Department of Health accepted all of our recommendations, albeit some with qualification.

The Department's submission indicates that it is making some progress in implementing the recommendations, but that much is seen to depend on the future efforts of others - particularly the Area Health Services.

Please find attached our comments on the progress reported in relation to each recommendation in our original report. We have not substantiated the submission.

In some instances, more information would be helpful to better understand what has been done to address our recommendations. In others, where the time target in the recommendation has not been fully achieved, the Department's timeline for completion of the necessary actions would be helpful.

I am happy to provide any further assistance the Committee may need in completing its examination.

Yours sincerely

A T Whitfield
Deputy Auditor-General

Attachment

Recommendation	Reported Action	Comment
1) establishes by December 2010 formal cancer networks that link radiotherapy centres in a way that clarifies, assures and specifies access to a complete range of cancer services for rural and regional residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas have been asked to formalise such networks progress has been affected by moves to form Local Hospital Networks 	Suggest ascertain timing and interim measures (if necessary).
2) continues to work with accreditation agencies to adopt by June 2010 agreed accreditation standards for radiation oncology services within their hospital accreditation processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> draft national standards being developed for Radiation Oncology 	Further work will be needed. Suggest ascertain likely timing and program to incorporate into existing accreditation processes.
3) systematically and consistently by June 2010 monitors, benchmarks and analyses the actual times taken between receipt of the referral to radiotherapy treatment centres and initial specialist consultation, and from 'ready for care' to treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some work has been done on definitions and data quality 	Further work is needed to develop and implement the performance management system. Suggest ascertain timing and program.
4) develops centralised booking systems by December 2009 for all radiotherapy treatment centres within a service network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas have been asked to develop centralised booking systems progress has been affected by moves to form Local Hospital Networks 	Further work is needed to establish centralised booking systems. Suggest ascertain timing and program.
5) identifies by June 2010 those people who are not within a reasonable distance or do not have reasonable access to radiotherapy facilities, and analyses where additional service and support efforts may be needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertaken as part of services planning new regional centres should see more than 95% of residents within 100 km of radiotherapy facilities 	No further comment
6) conducts detailed analysis of options for radiotherapy services (including public or private sector provision) and sites in the geographic areas of need, including the Central Coast, Hunter New England and Illawarra Shoalhaven areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertaken as part of services planning new developments have been announced 	No further comment
7) develops a workload measure by June 2010 that facilitates comparison of centres with different case-mixes and different techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a measure is being developed, which should be ready by March 2011 	No further comment
8) monitors and benchmarks by December 2009 operational performance measures for radiotherapy treatment centres including for quality, patient safety, waiting times, throughput, cost of treatment and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultant report identified 13 possible indicators document prepared to assist Areas with implementation 	Suggest ascertain implementation program.
9) assesses by June 2010 the value for money of working extended hours (including Saturday mornings), including the value to patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quote sought from consultant 	No further comment

Recommendation	Reported Action	Comment
10) analyses by December 2010 the variations of current staff levels between radiotherapy centres and develops staffing profiles for each centre which reflect volume, case-mix and complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultant will be engaged to analyse the variations 	No further comment
11) establishes by June 2010 more realistic 5 year and 10 year treatment benchmarks for each Area Health Service as a basis for assessing performance and planning the expansion of facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delayed pending national agreement on planning targets 	Suggest ascertain likely timing and how NSW Health plans to manage performance in the interim.
12) continues to monitor international evidence and assess the impact that radiotherapy services are having on patient outcomes as part of their overall cancer treatment, in order to clarify and agree what the patient outcomes and performance measures should be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuing, facilitated by national committee 	No further comment
13) develops and publishes by June 2010 a 10 year strategic plan for radiotherapy services, noting that the progress of its implementation will be determined by resource and funding availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan completed and issued in July 2010 	No further comment
14) assesses by June 2010 economies of scale to assist in considering the most cost effective machine configuration and the impact on access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quote sought from consultant 	No further comment
15) develops by June 2010 a firm funding strategy to support the replacement of existing machinery based on service need, age, state of repair, productivity, and life cycle costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas have been asked to ensure that an equipment replacement program is in place 	No further comment
16) analyses by June 2010 the affordability of its strategic plan, particularly in relation to Commonwealth payments and the implications of private sector involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful applications for Commonwealth funding 	Not clear as to affordability of future expansion and role (if any) of private sector.