The first networked satellite radiotherapy centre in UK – The Christie at Oldham


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Introduction

There has been a long standing need in Greater Manchester and Cheshire to increase capacity and improve local access to radiotherapy. Following an approved business proposal in 2008, The Christie embarked on the development of two satellite radiotherapy centres: at Oldham and Salford. The Christie at Oldham opened in March 2010 at The Royal Oldham Hospital (The Pennine Acute Hospitals Trust).

The purpose of a satellite centre is to improve access to radiotherapy, decentralise services, allow brand preservation and “off-site” expansion whilst being able to offer the standards of expertise and technology that The Christie provides. The host Pennine Trust, provides ancillary services such as pharmacy, pathology, radiology, physiotherapy and palliative care. This is provided under a service level agreement and has proven to be extremely successful.

Methods

The Christie at Oldham is equipped with a PHILIPS wide bore scanner and two ELEKTA Synergy linear accelerators delivering state-of-art radiotherapy using IMRT, IGRT and VMAT techniques. The centre provides CT scanning, virtual simulation via Philips Aqsim, treatment delivery, IGRT and in vivo dosimetry. Treatment planning for radical treatments is maintained at the main site. The innovation in our centre is that it works within a “paperless” environment while remaining completely linked to The Christie main site in Withington at all times. All radiotherapy-related documents, including final treatment plans at The Christie at Oldham, are approved using electronic signatures.

Results

The challenges of opening The Christie at Oldham have been demanding, addressing not only the design and build aspects but the clinical requirements to ensure the efficient, effective and safe running of the centre. Radiotherapy simulation and planning options, IT infrastructure, clinical and non-clinical support and the role of the review radiographer and nurse clinician, all had to be considered. The team actively sought to encourage skill-mix, extend roles and develop new services to undertake the challenges of an off-site service, whilst meeting the demands and guidelines of both Trusts.

The satellite staff (35 people) consists of radiographers, engineers, physicists, support personnel and the medical team. The majority of staff are located permanently in Oldham with a few rotating between sites (mainly physicists). The medical team is composed of three permanent members: a clinical oncologist (specialty doctor), a Macmillan nurse clinician and a Macmillan review radiographer. Visiting consultants are only on site for specific clinics linked to CT and virtual simulation sessions.

Role of the specialty doctor:
At The Christie at Oldham - the only clinician permanently on site, clinical cover for all patients undergoing radiotherapy and planning of palliative radiotherapy on site (e.g. bone metastases, spinal cord compression)
At the Christie in Withington (main site) - urology research clinic (chemotherapy and novel agents) and planning of radical radiotherapy.
In a Christie peripheral clinic – urology oncology clinic for new and follow-up patients.

When the centre opened, the initial plan was to start with the treatment of breast, prostate and rectal (short course treatment) cancers in medically fit patients. However, as the centre has developed, the patient groups have expanded. Currently, The Christie at Oldham provides radical and palliative radiotherapy for all tumour sites with the exception of concurrent chemo-radiotherapy and highly specialised treatment of rare cancers (e.g. sarcomas), which is provided at the main site.

Conclusion

Modern IT networks between the Christie at Oldham and the Christie main site allow the delivery of advanced radiotherapy techniques, while maintaining the same high standards of quality care – with the added advantage of it being delivered in the community. However, the key is communication. As the new centre continues to develop and increase its capacity, the Christie at Oldham is a clear example of inter-professional and inter-Trust teamwork and partnerships.