

**Address by the Honourable Dr. Fuad Khan**  
**Minister of Health**  
**National Oncology Centre Breakfast Meeting**  
**Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port of Spain**  
**Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012 @ 7:30am**

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**Salutations**

- Mrs. Antonia Popplewell, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health
- Dr. Akenath Misir, Ag Chief Medical Officer
- Me Stewart Smith, Senior Health Systems Advisor, Ministry of Health
- Mr Tye Farrow, Senior Partner, Farrow Partnership Architects
- Executive Members and Senior Officials of the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities
- Executive Members and representatives of the National Radiology Centre, Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society, South Cancer Support Group, Palliative Care Society and the Living Waters Community
- Specially invited guests and members of the Media

Good morning.

Cancer is the result of uncontrolled cell growth. Our bodies are composed of trillions of cells working together. In cancer, one of the cells stops paying attention to the normal signals which tells cells not to, or continue to replicate. In essence these cells become independent of the functions that make our body run smoothly.

Usually the process of abnormal growth is triggered by specific influences:

- (1) Viral
- (2) Environmental

- (3) Toxins
- (4) Genetic mutation

Cancer cells do share similar properties. Hence our ability to manage same. We are able to detect, manage, and now prevent, for instance Cabinet has approved the introduction of the HPV vaccine which can be administered to females to prevent cervical cancer.

Developing an oncology centre of excellence is determined by addressing various key strategies in order to develop international best practices in the field of oncological management of patients. Developing this centre required a significant amount of research during the development phase. This is followed by our unrelenting dedication to patient care and education of both staff and patients.

In order to develop this cancer centre of excellence, the National Oncology Centre, certain best practices were done. We analyzed the local needs and developed our programme utilizing this factor, and determined that the management of the facility must conform to the greatest needs. It is necessary to determine which cancers are affecting most patients, and then create programmes to serve those needs. Utilizing a need basis of development it was then determined what resources were available to service these needs. We decided what cancer equipment was necessary and what should be included in this programme. Farrow Partnership Architects has been on board from the beginning and has delivered a product based on these needs.

Recently Cabinet gave approval for the recommencement of work on the National Oncology Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Science Complex. This move forms part of our overall plan to deal with Chronic Non Communicable Diseases, which are a growing epidemic in Trinidad and Tobago. Cancer is actually the second leading cause of death among adults.

In the Ministry of Health's National Cancer Strategy, the National Oncology Centre at Mt. Hope would serve as the main treatment centre for cancer in the country, with two other specialist centres, also providing cancer treatment, including the existing National Radiotherapy Centre at the St. James Medical Complex and a new National Centre for Non-Communicable Diseases which would be located in Penal.

The National Oncology Centre will offer a sustainable, equitable, comprehensive, state-of-the-art system of cancer control. The centre's priority will be radiation oncology, along with a new focus on prevention and screening to reduce cancer incidence, quality assurance, and a patient-centred system of treatment and palliation.

A multidisciplinary team approach would be utilised, from diagnosis to treatment to cure under the central control of a specialist care team of oncologists, specialist physicians, specialist surgeons, interventional radiologists, histopathologists, haematologists, palliative care and pain management specialists, oncology pharmacists, oncology nurses, medical physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and counsellors/social workers.

Among the services which would be provided by the National Oncology Centre are:

- Radiation Therapy services using linear accelerator technology
- Chemotherapy
- CT Simulation
- Treatment Planning and
- High-Dose Radiation (HDR) Brachytherapy.

The Centre would also be equipped with a Superficial Radiation Treatment Room and a Shielded Operating Theatre for minor procedures, including biopsies, which also doubles as the HDR Suite.

We also propose to introduce world-class modern cancer treatment and diagnostic technologies such as the CyberKnife, PET/CT and Nuclear imaging to aid in the diagnosis and treatment of cancers in Trinidad and Tobago and attract build a first-class cancer centre that would be a model for health tourism in the Caribbean.

All of this technology would of course, be supported by ancillary services including:

- A full pharmacy service - chemo-drug mixing and general drug dispensing;
- A stat laboratory (haematology and chemistry) to facilitate the processing of blood samples for the determination of patient treatment on an as-need basis consistent with the Point-of-Care testing.

We also propose to include space provisions for supportive care, teaching, and research, patient counselling areas, volunteers' support space, library services for information dissemination, telemedicine conferencing technology and teaching spaces as well as quiet areas and healing spaces.

The National Radiotherapy Centre (NRC) located at the St. James Medical Complex, St. James is the current flagship referral centre of oncology care in the public sector. It provides a comprehensive range of cancer care services from a highly qualified group of specialists oncology professionals including:

- radiation therapy
- CT based treatment planning
- low-dose brachytherapy
- in-patient and out-patient chemotherapy
- palliative radiotherapy
- palliative care
- diagnostic radiography services
- comprehensive pharmacy services
- counselling and support services

We are in the process of upgrading the technology and services at this facility with the introduction of a linear accelerator with IMRT technology and HDR Brachytherapy, which will bring this facility into the 21<sup>st</sup> century of cancer care.

Specialist cancer care is also available at three (3) satellite cancer service units at the Sangre Grande Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital and the Scarborough Regional Hospital. There is also Specialist Lung Cancer Service at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC), and a Breast Assessment Centre at the NRC.

Further, we have decentralized the delivery of chemotherapy services to the RHAs, expanded the cancer drug formulary, and awarded national scholarships and bursaries to nationals pursuing specialist training in oncology. We have also established two (2) baccalaureate degree programmes in oncology nursing and radiation therapy training at the School of Advanced Nursing (SANE), UWI and COSTTAAT respectively.

Ladies and gentlemen, in addition to our thrust towards providing treatment and care for those afflicted with cancer and other diseases, the Ministry of Health continues to lead health initiatives to emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle for the prevention of CNCs such as our Fight the Fat Campaign, which includes community outreach health fairs, educational lectures and our annual Caribbean Wellness Day, which will be on August 11<sup>th</sup> 2012 at the Queen's Park Savannah.

When completed, the National Oncology Centre will have a number of ongoing research projects with proper peer reviews. There must be the development of internationally competitive research programmes in cancer research. This will include programmes in tumour epidemiology, outcome of management research, and the research into the identification of cancer risk factors, and predictive factors eg HPV and cervical cancer, oral cancer, anal warts and cancer, smoking and bladder cancer, lung cancer etc.

The centre will have a central area for the entry of cancer patients, with treatment performed by a multi-disciplinary team of clinical oncologists, and supported by an integrated clinical system of doctors of various specialities geared towards the management of the cancer patient:

- ❖ We will establish a data bank for tumour reporting and effects of treatment
- ❖ For each patient, proper records of patient diagnosis and management protocols will be recorded.
- ❖ We will have internationally acceptable standard operating procedures for diagnosis and treatment that reflect evidence-based oncology treatment.
- ❖ We will introduce a quality assessment system for diagnosis, oncology surgery, medical oncology and radiotherapy
- ❖ A centralized quality-controlled out-patient unit for chemotherapy will be developed
- ❖ We will develop an established and validated system for data collection and a proper cancer registry will be formed.
- ❖ The cancer centre will have an organizational structure with support from the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC) Hospital and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the West Indies (UWI).
- ❖ There will be the development of integrated psycho-social and palliative care. The centre must interact with patient advocacy groups.
- ❖ There will be a dedicated clinical trial centre with participation in innovative clinical studies

- ❖ There will be multi-disciplinary training programmes for physicians, physician scientists, nurses and related professions.
- ❖ There will be a definite auditing process conducted by a trained personnel in medical audit systems
- ❖ The centre will be managed by highly qualified personnel with a scientific background trained in oncology centre management. There will be a scientific advisory board and an executive committee versed in management of an oncology centre.

I wish to share with you at this point the schedule for the delivery of the National Oncology Centre:

- ❖ Tender for documents from consultants – July 30<sup>th</sup> 2012
- ❖ Invitation to Tender – August 6<sup>th</sup> 2012
- ❖ Tenders returned/bids closed – September 17<sup>th</sup> 2012
- ❖ Evaluation and award completed – October 31<sup>st</sup> 2012
- ❖ Construction start – November 12<sup>th</sup> 2012
- ❖ Construction period (expected to be a maximum 18 months)
- ❖ Commissioning of major equipment (expected to be 6 months)
- ❖ Opening/Operation of National Oncology Centre – November 2014

The total construction cost of the National Oncology Centre is \$663M, with an additional \$52M for equipment.

We operate on the premise that the health of our nation is its wealth and an ounce of prevention is always better than a pound of cure.

Thank you.