

State of Cancer/Health Service on the Island of Ireland

IRELAND

In Ireland, hospital care for patients with cancer is free at the point of delivery. Although 40 percent of the 4.1 million Irish citizens have private health insurance, the majority of patients with cancer (more than 80 percent) receive care within the public hospital system. Practically all care is provided within the country.

The strategic development of cancer policy in Ireland is progressed on a partnership basis involving multi-disciplinary cancer experts, voluntary non-governmental organizations, and health sector experts. Key recent developments have been in the areas of radiation oncology and breast screening.

In March 2003, the Minister for Health and Children announced the national roll-out of the National Breast Screening Programme. Under the extension, approximately 150,000 women in the target population 50 to 64 years of age will be eligible for free screening. Detailed planning is underway for the national roll-out of this programme.

With the October 2003 publication of the Report on *The Development of Radiation Oncology Services in Ireland*, the Irish government acknowledged that a major programme was required to rapidly develop clinical radiation oncology treatment services to modern standards. It was determined that the first phase should be the development of a clinical network of large centres in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

In December 2003, an evaluation of the 1996 National Cancer Strategy recognized Ireland as reaching its goal of reducing deaths from cancer by 15 percent in the under-65 year age group three years ahead of target. (Report can be found at www.doh.ie/pdfdocs/evalcsi.pdf.)

Since the implementation of the 1996 National Cancer Strategy, approximately €550 million (cumulative) has been invested in the development of appropriate treatment and care services for people with cancer. The Revised Estimate for 2004 shows a total gross estimate of almost €10.08 billion for the health services (€9,570 million current funding and €510 million capital funding)—a significant milestone that demonstrates the considerable investment over the past number of years. Such substantial investment has enabled the funding of 92 additional Consultant posts in key areas of cancer care.

The National Cancer Forum (the national advisory body to the Minister on Cancer Services) is currently developing a new National Cancer Strategy to be published in the near future. The new Strategy will address all aspects of cancer control, will set out the key priorities for the development of cancer services over the coming years, and will make recommendations in relation to the organisation of cancer services nationally. The Forum recognizes that quality and cancer control will have a significant bearing on any future organisational model.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cancer care is free at the point of delivery for Northern Ireland's population of approximately 1.7 million. Northern Ireland has screening programmes including breast screening, offered to all women aged 50-64 since 1993, and population-based cervical screening available to all women over the age of 20. Discussions are currently under way to consider screening for colorectal cancer.

Since 1996, cancer clinical services have been significantly reorganised in Northern Ireland following the release of the report, Cancer Services: Investing for the Future, also known as the Campbell Report. This report acted as the major catalyst to redevelop cancer services in Northern Ireland, which resulted in a cancer centre for Northern Ireland at Belfast City Hospital, as well as the opening of four cancer units in Altnagelvin, Antrim, Ulster, and Craigavon Hospitals. The goals of this new cancer clinical service are to coordinate cancer treatment, prevention, screening, education, training, and research programmes throughout Northern Ireland, and to provide a patient-centred service.

In 2003, the Northern Ireland Cancer Network (NICaN) was established under the auspices of the Board Chief Executives of the cancer units to continue progressive improvement in the quality of care for all cancer patients.