

Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital New Oncology Unit Now Ready For Operations

By Hon. Ntandokazi Capa, MEC for Health, Eastern Cape

Cancer does not seek permission. It does not wait for a referral letter, and it does not respect distance.

For decades, a diagnosis of cancer in OR Tambo, Alfred Nzo, Joe Gqabi and Amathole has meant a second sentence, the burden of travelling hundreds of kilometres to East London, Gqeberha or outside the province to access radiotherapy. Families have depleted life savings on transport and accommodation. Treatment has been delayed. Lives have been lost not because care does not exist, but because care was too far.

That long, painful journey is now coming to an end.

The new oncology unit at Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital in Mthatha stands ready to admit its first patient. We are bringing cancer care home.

What we have built is not merely a building. It is a statement of intent, a state of the art, future proofed centre of excellence for the people of the eastern Eastern Cape.

This is a purpose built, two storey structure with a basement, spanning 5 133 square metres, and engineered to accommodate two additional floors in future without disrupting services. At its heart is a world class radiotherapy department with a linear accelerator bunker, equipped with a LINAC, the gold standard in precision radiotherapy that targets tumours while sparing healthy tissue.

We deliberately designed this unit around the patient, not the disease.

On the ground floor, patients will be received in dignified reception and waiting areas, with dedicated spaces for consultation, counselling, resuscitation and chemotherapy. We have built a fully compliant oncology pharmacy with chemo mixing, chemo dispensary, quarantine and ward issue, ensuring that every dose is prepared safely, on site, under pharmacist supervision.

On the first floor, we have created compassionate inpatient care, male and female wards, and, on explicit clinical advice, increased paediatric oncology beds from five to eight, because children with cancer deserve care that is distinct, gentle and specialised. Doctor call rooms, clinical support and counselling rooms ensure that care is continuous, day and night.

The unit is seamlessly integrated into Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital through a suspended link bridge connecting directly to radiology, laboratory, theatre, CSSD and other clinical support services. From imaging to diagnosis, to treatment planning with our new CT simulator, to chemotherapy and radiotherapy, a patient will now move within one precinct of care.

For the first time, the people of this region will access both chemotherapy and radiotherapy in Mthatha. Early diagnosis will be matched by early treatment. A mother from Libode, a father from Matatiele, a child from Ngqeleni will no longer have to choose between treatment and feeding their family.

This unit restores what cancer has stolen from rural families, time, dignity and proximity to family support, which is itself a form of medicine.

Like all complex clinical infrastructure, we listened to our clinicians and improved the original design to serve patients better. We strengthened the structure from strip and pad to pile foundations to carry future load, ensured full compliance with safety and building regulations with a second lift for patients and for goods and services, provided a concrete roof slab to allow future expansion, and expanded clinical functionality in line with specialist pharmacy and oncology norms. This is a facility built to last for the next fifty years, not five.



When I assumed office in June 2024, specialist oncology services were concentrated in two metros, leaving the eastern seaboard profoundly underserved. We committed to decentralise highly specialised care, and we have done so with discipline and transparency.

This R416 million investment for construction and cutting edge equipment is the single largest oncology investment in the history of this province outside the metros. It complements our broader R1.8 billion infrastructure renewal programme, which includes the new R100 million plus Mental Health Unit at St Barnabas Hospital in Libode.

We have started the appointment process for additional staff for the new oncology unit to ensure that when the doors open, the service is fully capacitated with oncologists, radiotherapists, oncology nurses, pharmacists and psychosocial support.

The official opening is planned for the end of October.

We are not merely maintaining the health system in the Eastern Cape. We are fundamentally transforming it.

To the people of the Eastern Cape, I say, if you feel a lump, if you have persistent bleeding, unexplained weight loss or a sore that does not heal, please present early to your clinic or hospital. Early detection saves lives, and now, treatment is coming closer to you.

Oncology care is returning home to Mthatha. And with it, hope is returning home.

Hon. Ntandokazi Yolisa Capa is the MEC for Health in the Eastern Cape.

