



Taking medical care to the next level

The **Hermitage Clinic** continues to innovate as it develops, writes Margaret O'Brien

The **Hermitage Medical Clinic** (HMC), based in Lucan, off Dublin's M50, will celebrate its seventh anniversary later this year and while chief executive Eamonn Fitzgerald is very satisfied with the achievements of the clinic to date he is also concerned for the future of the Independent Hospital Sector in Ireland.

"My concern is due to the introduction of certain policy decisions such as charging all declared private patients in public hospitals with effect from January 1, 2014 and the continuous discounting by Private Health Insurance Underwriters of Independent Hospitals for the provision of high quality care," said Fitzgerald.

He argued that the three key reasons why people should retain private health insurance were: access, quality and value. "In an independent hospital such as **Hermitage Medical Clinic** you are guaranteed consultant delivered care rather than consultant led care," he said.

With regard to HMC, he was particularly pleased that it had built a strong local, regional and national referral base during its first seven years and he was also very proud of the clinic's staff.

"We have highly skilled and committed staff who deliver care with compassion and dignity to patients," he said. "We have a strong focus on patient and family within a community context and we want to contribute to the development of new models of care that focus on healthcare rather than sick care.

"Our focus is on prevention of illness and maintenance of wellbeing and health. Our approach is to look at the health of the population and to address areas such as health education for children and parents.

"To make this happen we engage actively with schools, sports and recreation organisations. We run open evenings and talks for members of the public with the aim to educate them about illness but also about wellness. Our hope is to introduce them to better practices and outcomes. We are committed to contribute more at local and national level and we would also like to contribute to health policy," said Fitzgerald.

HMC has also redefined relationships within the medical and patient arenas. "We have engendered excellent working relationships between GPs and clinicians, with a basis in co-operation and we also ensure that care is actually delivered to patients by the consultants, rather than having a

system where care is consultant-led, which is the more typical approach in public hospitals."

In keeping with its community focus, HMC recently launched six new satellite clinics with a regional spread in Drogheda, Navan, Mullingar, Portlaoise, Athlone and Naas.

"The idea behind these outreach clinics is to bring consultants to the patients in the community. By responding in this way to patient needs and by working in cooperation with GPs, it means that patients can receive care closer to home."

HMC now offers emergency services seven days a week and more recently launched a chest pain evaluation clinic, and a rapid access to diagnostics.

"Our consultants are fellowship trained, across the full spectrum of medicine and surgery. We only have top quality consultants, who are specialists in their field, who share the care with GPs," said Fitzgerald.

Since HMC opened its doors, it has been acknowledged for its innovation. "From the way we approach the care of our patients, to having the best diagnostic and therapeutic facilities, leading edge technology and equipment, innovation has been at the core of our success."

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That spirit of innovation continues and next month HMC becomes the first hospital in Ireland to introduce the Cyberknife Robotic Radiosurgery System, a non-invasive alternative to surgery for the treatment of both cancerous and non-cancerous tumours anywhere in the body.

"We will also introduce Cyberheart, another clinical application of the Cyberknife, on a trial basis in the New Year," said Fitzgerald.

Other ground-breaking treatments available from HMC include Brachytherapy for the treatment of prostate cancer, Green Light Laser treatment for those with benign prostate conditions and Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy (ESWL) which uses sound waves to break kidney or gall stones into small pieces that can more easily pass through the body.

On the cardiology front, HMC has a fully functional cardiac catheterisation laboratory (Cath Lab) with excellent technology including additional devices and imaging tools that are useful for a very broad range of purposes. Cardiac MRI and CT (non invasive) are offered in addition to cardio stenting.

HMC is particularly strong in the specialist area of neurosurgery, with a talented team of eight top consultant neurosurgeons having based their



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private practice there. This team provides both an inpatient and outpatient neurosurgery service with special interests including motor neuron disease, peripheral nerve disease, primary muscle disorders, epilepsy, headache, neurogenetics, movement disorders, early onset dementia and inflammatory disorders of the nervous

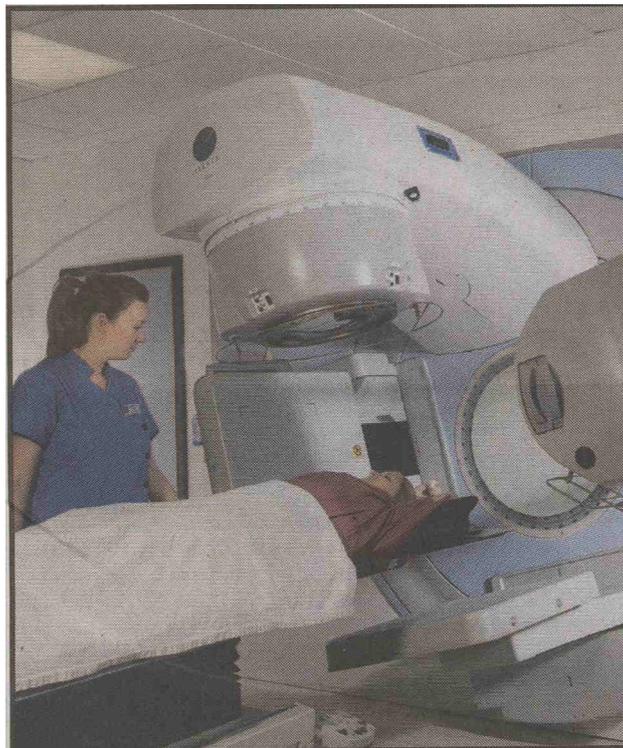
system.

Another key area for HMC is research, development and education. "We are an affiliated teaching hospital of the RCSI, TCD and UCD and we take medical students and allied health professionals from these universities as well as nursing students from Dundalk IT," said Fitzgerald. "From the

New Year we will also take nursing students from DCU for training.

While Fitzgerald and his team are delighted by how much has been achieved in a few short years, looking ahead, he said: "The unnerving issue is the danger of a major lost opportunity because of the lack of joined up thinking in

the formulation of health policy and the design and commissioning of health infrastructure between the public and independent, private, hospital systems to ensure that scarce resources – new capital, clinical expertise and existing capacity – are used to the maximum benefit of citizens of the state."



Linear Accelerator for Radiotherapy at The **Hermitage Medical Clinic**