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Robot a cancer mix-fix

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Grant McArthur
November 19, 2008 12:00am

AN Australian-first chemotherapy robot will provide an extra 10,000 doses of life-saving drugs to Victorian cancer patients.

The state-of-the-art machine will take over mixing of highly toxic chemotherapy drugs at the **Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre** (<http://www.petermac.org>), allowing one-third more treatments to be prepared and limiting staff exposure to dangerous chemicals.

The state's flagship cancer hospital administers 20,000 chemotherapy treatments a year; however, the Cytocare robot could provide up to 30,000 when it becomes fully operational early next year to meet an expected rise in demand in coming years.

The \$900,000 machine is the first in Australia and only the third in the Asia Pacific region, and could become a forerunner for other chemotherapy robots in cancer hospitals across Victoria if it passes a cost-effectiveness analysis over the next year.

Unveiling the machine yesterday, Health Minister **Daniel Andrews** (<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/handbook/searchresult.cfm?menuid=1&memberId=1583>) said the Government's \$150 million Cancer Action Plan was providing breakthrough technology to improve efficiency, quality control and safety for patients and staff.

"It's a great example of when, if you give the best staff the best medical equipment, they in turn can provide the very best care," he said.

"That's what this \$900,000 grant is all about."

In the past, teams of pharmacists have been locked in isolation rooms for two-hour shifts to mix cocktails of up to 10 different drugs by hand, taking between a half-hour and an hour on a single dose.

The robot can do the same work in two-thirds of the time with no exposure to staff.

Peter MacCallum pharmacy director Sue Kirsas has been concerned about the effects of constant exposure to toxic drugs.

"This new technology will help provide a safer . . . work environment for our staff, and also assist us in ensuring the quality of products we deliver to our patients," she said.

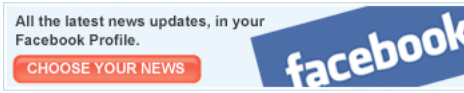
"The quicker we can get our patients in and out of the hospital and treated, the better it is for them."

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