



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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CANADA'S NEWEST CANCER WEAPON

An address by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, delivered at the official opening of the Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation's Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Clinic, Toronto.

.... We are gathered here today to mark a most significant step forward in the programme of the Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation -- the official opening of a Toronto clinic for a new Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Unit. It is a matter of considerable pride to me, of course, that the Federal Government, in co-operation with provincial authorities, has been able to provide substantial financial support for the establishment of this clinic and the installation of the so-called "Cobalt Bomb".

The National Health Programme

In recent years no nation has shown greater energy than Canada in its efforts to defeat the deadly scourge of cancer. Because of this, there is developing all across this country a growing unity of effort and a better-balanced distribution of facilities and services for the detection and treatment of this disease.

To supplement the efforts of the provincial governments and of agencies like the Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation, a very considerable cancer grant was included in the National Health Programme inaugurated five and a half years ago. Since the beginning of this Programme, the Federal Government has set aside more than \$15,000,000 to be used on a matching basis with funds provided by the provinces to buy equipment; to train and employ staff; to purchase radium; to support research; and to make possible installations of the new Canadian-developed Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Units.

As a result, while cancer is still the second leading cause of death in Canada, there is greater hope for the cancer sufferer today than ever before. In cancer research, for example, more has been accomplished in the last thirty years than in the preceding three centuries. As we are gradually coming to understand more about the nature of cancer, increased efforts are at the same time being made to improve treatment facilities, to extend preventive and diagnostic services and to develop greater public awareness of the known facts about cancer.

Because of diagnostic aids for earlier detection of cancer, major advances in surgery, improvements in X-ray devices, the wider use of radium and the development of Cobalt 60 Units, thousands of cancer victims are still alive today who would have had little hope of recovery a few short years ago.

The Development of Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy

A notable milestone in Canada's cancer programme was the development by Canadian Government scientists of the Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Unit. This apparatus, which provides a new and potent weapon to combat cancer, has received world-wide recognition and places Canada among the leaders in the fight against cancer. At the present time the demand for these units, both here and abroad, is greater than can be met by the Crown Company -- Atomic Energy of Canada Limited -- which is still the world's only producer of this equipment.

It is now just two years since the first cancer patient was treated with Cobalt 60 radiation at London's Victoria Hospital, where the first installation of this equipment was made. While Government physicists were working on the development of the Cobalt 60 apparatus, similar equipment was built independently in Saskatchewan by Dr. Johns of Saskatoon. Shortly after, Government-built units were installed in Vancouver and Winnipeg.

The present Toronto installation brings to five the total number of units now in operation across Canada. Canadian-built equipment has also been purchased for hospitals in the United States at New York, Chicago and Minneapolis; for the Mount Vernon Hospital in London, England; and for a centre in Italy.

Plans are now being worked out in co-operation with the provincial governments and professional authorities in the cancer field for the orderly development of an extended programme that will cover the entire country. It is our hope that Cobalt 60 Units will eventually be in operation in every province and particularly at university centres where trained physicists and medical consultants are continually available for advice and necessary supervision over the complex operation of this important new type of equipment.

At the present time, Atomic Energy of Canada is building a new and more powerful reactor which will increase substantially the supply of cobalt available for this purpose. In consequence, it is expected that beginning in December of next year, it will be possible to step up production to two new units each month.

In the Province of Ontario, as I have already noted, there are at present two Cobalt 60 Units -- at London and here in Toronto at this clinic which is being opened today. I understand that ultimately the new Ontario Cancer Institute to be built in this city will include two units, along with other modern electric and therapeutic equipment.

As for this Institute, while the Federal Government has not yet received a formal request for assistance, on the basis of preliminary information concerning the size

of the Institute and its technical equipment, it can be anticipated that federal assistance, within the terms of the Hospital Construction and Cancer Control Grants will be very substantial.

As a logical extension of Ontario's cancer treatment services, I am happy to announce today that the Federal Government has just approved financial assistance towards the purchase of two additional Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Units, to be installed at Hamilton and Windsor. I am advised that delivery of this equipment can be expected next Spring. The province's two remaining University centres, Ottawa and Kingston, may be expected to complete construction arrangements for the receipt of Cobalt 60 Units soon thereafter.

While the "Cobalt Bomb" is one of the most heartening developments of recent years, there is still a great deal of research that must be undertaken before the full extent of its effectiveness and the nature of its limitations are known. Cobalt 60 radiations do not offer a positive cure for all forms of cancer. Its rays, however, provide a means of treating certain cancerous conditions, particularly those of a deep-seated nature, more efficiently than with either radium or X-rays. Moreover, the new Cobalt 60 Units provide hospitals and foundations with radiation equipment for cancer treatment at a much lower cost than was previously possible. Let me illustrate:

One Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Unit, which costs from about \$50,000 to \$80,000, depending on the model, produces more radiation than the total world supply of medically-used radium which, of course, is worth millions of dollars. In contrast to X-rays, the Cobalt Unit can do the work of a 2,000,000-volt X-ray machine which would cost almost three times as much to build. Thus the development of the Cobalt 60 Unit has brought radiation treatment more readily within the reach of strategically-located large hospitals and, in so doing, offers new hope to thousands of cancer sufferers across Canada.

Continued Effort Necessary

The development of the Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Unit by Canadian Government physicists is more than an isolated achievement. It is a symbol of our determination to come to grips with one of the nation's most urgent health problems. Today, with the full support of the Federal Government and with the whole-hearted co-operation of the provinces and of the voluntary societies, Canada is making every effort to bring cancer to bay by improving our diagnostic facilities, extending our treatment services, and accelerating our research activities.

While we can take encouragement from recent progress, there is no room for complacency about cancer. Those of us who are responsible for planning the expenditure of funds to fight this great killer are proud of the leadership already shown by cancer experts in this country. But we must continue our efforts to see that the gaps in existing services are filled and that available facilities are co-ordinated to the very best advantage.

We are inclined sometimes to be discouraged by the limitations in our present knowledge of the secrets of cancer's wild and disordered growth. But the real tragedy of cancer is that knowledge and skills now exist and that facilities like this are now available for many people who delay seeing their physicians until it is too late. It is said that early and accurate diagnosis is still our most important weapon in the fight against cancer. It is, therefore, most encouraging that, year by year, with greater public awareness of the problem, better diagnostic facilities and more trained workers, our chances of diagnosing cancer in the early and more manageable stages are steadily improving.

I have no doubt that in the years ahead Canada will find new weapons to detect, to treat and to defeat cancer. Your plans for a new Centre, of which this clinic is the forerunner, represent a great step forward. I am proud that the Federal Government has a significant share in its establishment. And so, for the men and women who will staff this clinic, may I recall words recently used by one of the world's leading cancer experts, Sir Stanford Cade:

"To give courage to those who need it
to restore the desire for life to those
who have abandoned it, and with our
skill to heal disease or to check its
course."

This, then, is your task -- your duty -- and your privilege.

S/A