

25 August 2025

Endorsement – UCT Proton Therapy Initiative

The South African Society of Clinical and Radiation Oncology (SASCRO) endorses the University of Cape Town Proton Therapy Initiative – an ambitious and groundbreaking project to establish the country's first proton beam therapy unit. As a leading professional organization representing the clinical and radiation oncologists in our country, we recognise the transformative impact this initiative will have on cancer care, medical education and research as well as on regional healthcare development.

The establishment of a proton therapy unit would represent a quantum leap forward in precision oncology for our nation. This pioneering facility would address a critical gap in our healthcare infrastructure by providing access to one of the most advanced forms of radiation therapy available globally.

The ability to treat children with proton therapy is particularly significant, as this technology offers superior dose distribution compared to conventional radiotherapy. For paediatric patients, this translates to:

- Reduced radiation exposure to healthy developing tissues
- Decreased risk of secondary malignancies
- Improved long-term quality of life outcomes
- Enhanced prospects for normal growth and development post-treatment

Adult patients will similarly benefit from the precision targeting capabilities of proton therapy, particularly those with tumours located near critical organs or requiring re-irradiation. This technology could enable treatment of previously inoperable or challenging cases with improved therapeutic ratios.

This initiative would position the University of Cape Town and our country as a regional leader in advanced cancer care. Patients from neighbouring countries who currently travel internationally for proton therapy would have access to world-class treatment within the region. The unit could facilitate regional partnerships, research collaborations, and knowledge sharing across borders, strengthening the healthcare ecosystem throughout the region.

The educational component of this project would be of paramount importance to our society, particularly given the critical shortage of scarce-skilled healthcare professionals specialised in radiation oncology and medical physics. A proton therapy unit would provide unprecedented training opportunities for radiation oncologists, medical physicists, radiation therapists and dosimetrists. The integration with the University's academic programs could create unique research opportunities with undergraduate and postgraduate students gaining exposure to cutting-edge technology. Research opportunities flourish at the intersection of clinical practice and innovation – a proton therapy unit could catalyse research activities that are currently impossible without access to this technology. This may result in opportunities to participate in international clinical trials as well as the development of local research protocols specific to our patient populations in South Africa. Publication of outcomes data would contribute to global knowledge of this technology.

SASCRO wholeheartedly endorses the University of Cape Town Proton Therapy Initiative. We recognise that projects of this magnitude require substantial investment and sustained commitment, however, the potential benefits – in terms of lives saved, quality of life improved, professionals trained, and regional healthcare advancement – far outweigh the investment.

We encourage all stakeholders – government entities, private sector partners, philanthropic organisations and international collaborators – to join us in supporting this visionary project. The establishment of our country's first proton beam therapy unit would represent more than a technological advancement – it would represent hope for thousands of current and future cancer patients as well as a commitment to excellence that could define our healthcare system for generations to come.

Congratulations to the University of Cape Town for their leadership in pursuing this transformative project.