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CANCER PATIENTS IN DARK

SUE DUNLEVY

ONE in three cancer patients is missing out on crucial radiotherapy and many of those who receive it have to wait more than a month to begin treatment.

Senior radiologist and researcher Professor Michael Barton said patients were missing out because their doctors didn't inform them about it.

Prof Barton warned that wait times would get worse unless new radiotherapy machines were provided to cope with the ever-rising number of cancer cases.

"We need six new linear accelerators a year just to keep pace, that's not overcoming the existing gap in treatment," he said.

Radiotherapy shrinks tumours before surgery and is used after surgery to stop the growth of any remaining cancer cells.

It is also used to relieve pain in terminal cancer cases.

Prof Barton said half of all cancer patients could benefit from radiotherapy to cure their disease or relieve the pain of advanced cancer but only one in three patients was receiving it.

"If everyone got access we could save one million lives by 2035 (worldwide)," he said.