

April 7, 2022

**For Immediate Release**

**CHRISTUS ST. VINCENT INTENDS TO TERMINATE CONTRACT EARLY WITH  
NEW MEXICO CANCER CARE ASSOCIATES**

**The move could leave over 4,000 cancer patients without their  
chosen doctor and treatment plan.**

SANTA FE, N.M. – CHRISTUS St. Vincent Regional Medical Center has notified the New Mexico Cancer Care Associates (NMCCA) that after 11 years, it intends to abruptly terminate their contract on May 27, 2022, leaving cancer patients without their doctors and treatment plans.

CHRISTUS sent a letter from their attorneys to NMCCA on March 28, writing, “the Hospital intends to terminate both Service Agreements May 27, 2022.”

NMCCA currently serves over 4,000 cancer patients at its Santa Fe clinic.

NMCCA has had exclusive management and professional services contracts with CHRISTUS since 2011 to treat cancer patients in Northern New Mexico, at the only cancer facility in the area. The partnership has worked well for over a decade, and patients have received excellent care from NMCCA, without complaint from CHRISTUS.

The current contract is set to terminate at the end of the year, with a transition plan in place for the patients, but CHRISTUS has abruptly notified NMCCA about terminating early, sending patient care into confusion.

“It’s unreasonable that CHRISTUS would want to abruptly leave cancer patients without their chosen doctors at a crucial time in their treatment,” said Dr. Karen LoRusso, an oncologist at NMCCA. “As cancer doctors, we are deeply troubled that CHRISTUS has not indicated how they intend to care for these thousands of patients.”

CHRISTUS had recently approached NMCCA with an offer to make all its physicians and staff employees of the hospital and turn over management of the clinic to CHRISTUS. However, the oncologists of NMCCA believe it is in the best interests of their patients to remain independent and they chose not to pursue employment negotiations, hoping instead to extend its service

agreement with the hospital and to include a broader and more integrated array of services for patients.

After it became clear that NMCCA desired to forge a different relationship with CHRISTUS than CHRISTUS wanted, NMCCA received the March 28<sup>th</sup> letter indicating the Hospital's intent to terminate the contract seven months early.

Indeed, the March 28<sup>th</sup> letter leaves no doubt about the hospital's underlying rationale for its abrupt decision, noting that "NMCCA's actions indicate that it is instead focused on working towards a separate future."

"The message from CHRISTUS is that if you don't want to work with them exclusively, or work as employees for the hospital, they don't want to work with you, regardless of what's best for the patients," said Dr. Kathryn Chan, president of NMCCA.

If NMCCA loses its contract with the hospital, it cannot continue to see patients until it is able to negotiate new agreements with health plans, which could take several months. How the patients would be cared for and treated in the meantime has not been determined as of yet.

"We have asked CHRISTUS to put the patients first and not terminate the contract early, so that thousands of cancer patients don't lose their doctors and treatment plans," said Dr. Scott Herbert, a physician at NMCCA. "We need a good transition plan for the patients."

CHRISTUS has announced a new cancer center, scheduled to open sometime in 2024, but it is unclear at this time who will serve patients in the interim.

"CHRISTUS's plan to build its own separate oncology service should not jeopardize the patients currently in our care," said Dr. Fei Gu, an oncologist at NMCCA. "New Mexico Cancer Care Associates has always had the best treatment options for patients, and it should be able to continue to provide care without any unnecessary interruptions."

In the March 28<sup>th</sup> letter, CHRISTUS asserted that termination was justified because staffing levels had dropped at NMCCA. However, CHRISTUS recently lured away one of NMCCA's oncologists to work directly for the hospital.

"They can't attempt to induce a staff shortage and then claim we're short-staffed because of their actions," said Dr. Herbert. "It's unfathomable and, to say the least, hypocritical."

NMCCA states clearly that current staffing levels are sufficient to handle the patients. NMCCA also says it has hired a new oncologist who starts this summer, and that CHRISTUS is aware of this information. Wait times to see patients remain the same and treatments are on schedule.

NMCCA sent a detailed written response to CHRISTUS today, refuting, among other issues, the purported staffing problem and asked that the hospital enter into mediation to create a solution that's in the best interests of the patients.

“In any case, CHRISTUS should put patients first and rescind its intention to terminate seven months early to avoid confusing these patients about the future of their care,” said Dr. Chan. “We want to put patients first, and we need the hospital to work out a solution.”

If a settlement cannot be reached, NMCCA anticipates going to court to stop the early termination. However, it hopes that mediation can result in a successful outcome for the patients.

“We want to assure all our patients that we are doing everything possible to find a solution that enables them to continue seeing their preferred physician and continue their current treatment plan,” said Dr. Gu.