

Just 'Gatwick Road', No Number, for High-Tech Company with 55 years Heritage on Manor Royal

Varian Medical Systems – formerly TEM – has been resident on Manor Royal since 1955



Today, Varian Medical Systems is the global leader in radiotherapy. Two out of every three people treated with modern radiotherapy worldwide will be treated on Varian machines. More than 100,000 treatments a day, or 35 million a year, are carried out using Varian linear accelerators to deliver high energy x-rays and combat tumours. Yet when US-based Varian bought the former TEM in 1984, modern conformal radiotherapy was still very much in the future.

“Radiotherapy has come on leaps and bounds in recent years,” says Varian spokesman Neil Madle. “Great strides have been made since the mid-1990s in the ability to shape the beam to the shape of the tumour, take account of patient motion, create sophisticated treatment plans and deliver higher doses while protecting surrounding healthy tissue. Radiotherapy has become the most efficient and cost-effective curative cancer treatment available to patients and Varian has been at the forefront of these staggering advances.”

Just this year, Varian introduced the TrueBeam linear accelerator, the most advanced machine of its kind, able to deliver doses at twice the rate of existing machines, with resulting benefits in speed and precision. The first three TrueBeam accelerators in the UK will be installed at hospitals in London, Ipswich and Plymouth in 2011. The introduction of TrueBeam means certain hard-to-treat tumours such as lung and liver can now be treated effectively by radiotherapy rather than the patient having to endure traumatic surgical procedures and long recovery periods.

Varian’s Crawley facility has played its part in the TrueBeam story, designing a radically different high-performance couch to enable patient positioning to keep pace with beam shaping and delivery. “The innovation in Crawley has meant more work for the local operation and therefore more business for Gatwick Diamond companies, as many

suppliers to Varian are local," says Andy Partridge, Varian's manufacturing manager. "The additional respect and confidence gained from the parent company in the US makes it more likely that there will be further opportunities for expansion in the future. Our UK operation is now an integral part of Varian's next generation product line and therefore there is greater long-term security as a Varian manufacturing site."

When Varian acquired the former TEM in 1984, the UK plant had already become a pioneer in the manufacture of radiation therapy simulators. It was Ronald Myles who steered a precision equipment manufacturer towards radiotherapy, building the stand and gantry of a Cobalt 60 teletherapy unit in 1955. Ronald's son Nick still works at Varian's Crawley facility as international human resources director.

"This company has a mission to help save an additional 100,000 lives each year," says Nick Myles. "This mission focuses everybody's attention and ensures we constantly strive to produce the best work we can. There is extremely low staff turnover here because people are committed to this cause."

In 1964, TEM manufactured the first commercial radiotherapy treatment-planning simulator, the prototype of which was installed at Hammersmith Hospital, London. Five years later, the first simulator was sold, this time to nearby St Bart's Hospital. Both hospitals are still key customers of Varian today.

The paths of TEM and Varian crossed in the early 1980s. At the time, TEM acted as UK distributor for Varian's Clinac linear accelerators and Varian was returning the favour by distributing TEM's simulators. When Varian bought TEM in 1984, the site had some 60 people producing about 15 simulators per annum, along with other radiotherapy equipment.

The first Ximatron simulator – the forerunner to the current Acuity – was installed in 1986 and manufacturing of the Exact Couch was phased in from the US the same year. With Varian's brachytherapy business growing in importance, it was not long before a VariSource manufacturing line and Varian Brachytherapy engineering facility was established at Crawley.

In recent years, Varian UK has gone from strength to strength, winning prestigious national awards for export, technology and training and growing extremely successful sales, service and support groups. At the time Varian acquired TEM, it employed 60 people and was a \$1 million company. Today, Varian's UK operation employs 220 people and contributes more than £100 million (\$150 million) per annum.

Contributed by Steve Pullen (Manufacturing Engineering Manager)

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