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Media Release

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With construction into its eighth month, the redevelopment of the Newcastle Mater Misericordiae Hospital reaches a building milestone today, with a “Topping Out” ceremony taking place on the roof of the new South Block.

Abigroup and Novacare, partners in the redevelopment, are following a building and construction tradition that marks the completion of the highest point of the structure. One of the world’s rarest plants, a Wollemi Pine, will be placed on top of the building to commemorate the occasion. The pine will become a feature in the hospital’s landscape.

Mr Matthew Davies, Project Director of Abigroup for the redevelopment said construction is on schedule.

“Anyone who has driven past the site will see that it has been a very busy and productive eight months of construction to reach this stage. The most visible construction at the moment is the concrete and steel framed South Block in Platt Street and the Radiation Oncology Bunkers.

“Construction is on schedule, and will be installing the roof this month. We’ll have already commenced the fit out, and are on track to hand over South Block for operation to commence in January 2008, and the new Radiation Bunkers early next year.

South Block includes new operating theatres, a medical day centre and new wards. The expansion of cancer radiation therapy facilities at the Mater includes the construction of extra equipment and refurbishment of existing facilities. It will allow for two new linear accelerators (cancer treatment machines) and building infrastructure to support these machines well into the future.

Mr Colin Osborne, General Manager of the Newcastle Mater Hospital congratulated everyone who has worked to bring the project to this stage.

“Hunter New England Health and The Mater Hospital, together with Novacare* consortium are working in unison to deliver a range of new and expanded high quality health services when the redevelopment is completed in just over three years’ time,” Mr Osborne said.

“Today marks a significant milestone in the hospital’s overall redevelopment. We congratulate and thank our consortium building partner, Abigroup, on achieving this building milestone and look forward to working with them to ensure local people have access to high quality services”.

Novacare’s General Manager, Mr Stewart Walters said

"The Novacare consortium is very pleased with progress on this important project. The tangible results that are now able to be seen on the site reflect the beneficial working relationship and commitment from Hunter New England Health, the Newcastle Mater Hospital management and the consortium partners including Westpac, Abigroup, Honeywell and Medirest."

The redevelopment includes:

- \$80 million redevelopment of the Newcastle Mater Hospital;
- \$34 million construction of a new 96-bed acute mental health facility on the Mater Hospital site (including 10 additional acute mental health beds) to replace existing facilities at James Fletcher Hospital;
- \$18 million expansion of cancer radiation therapy facilities at the Mater, including the construction of extra equipment and refurbishment of existing facilities.

* Novacare Solutions Partnership represents a consortium including Abigroup Contractors (builders), Medirest Australia (Soft Facilities Management), Honeywell Australia (Hard Facilities Management), and Westpac Institutional Bank (Finance).

Media are invited to attend the Topping out ceremony on Monday 11 September at 10am. The ceremony will take place at the Abigroup Administration office at the Newcastle Mater hospital, located on top of the Platt Street car park.

Background

The Topping Out Ceremony

The topping out ceremony is one that has been perpetuated by builders throughout the centuries to give thanks for a successful completion of the job without loss of life or injury and recognises the achievement of workers on the job. A more recent addition to the ceremony is to generate good luck for the future occupants of the building. During the ceremony a pine tree is raised by crane to the top level.

The exact origin of this traditional ceremony is uncertain but it has a place in folklore of ancient Scandinavia and Germany and probably came to Britain with the invading tribes from these regions. These days, a Topping Out ceremony is held to mark the completion of the highest point of the structure and provides an opportunity for the client, contractor and subcontractors to celebrate this milestone achievement.

Source: <http://uktradeinvest.britaus.net>

The Wollemi Pine

This particular ceremony will be special in that a Wollemi Pine will be used. The Wollemi Pine was re-discovered in 1994 in the Greater Blue Mountains area.

The Wollemi Pine is a "living fossil". Its evolutionary line was thought to be long extinct. The ancient conifer family *Araucariaceae*, to which it belongs, has fossil representation as old as the Triassic Period (over 200 million years ago). The *Araucariaceae* reached maximum diversity during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, between 200 and 65 million years ago, when it had a worldwide distribution. Range and diversity was greatly reduced at the end of the Cretaceous period, at the time of the extinction of the dinosaurs, when the *Araucariaceae* became extinct in the Northern Hemisphere. The numbers slowly declined ever since.

The Wollemi Pine is one of the world's rarest plants, with fewer than 40 adult plants known to be in two small groves. The survival of this small pocket of trees is remarkable. The discovery of the Wollemi Pine emphasises the importance of having significant areas for the conservation of natural communities.

Source - <http://www.wollemipine.com>

The Wollemi Pine used in the ceremony will be planted in the permanent landscaping on the Newcastle Mater Hospital Redevelopment, together with a commemoration plaque.

For further information, contact;

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