Good morning and thank you for inviting me to deliver the Official Welcome to delegates attending the 30th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land—the Mouheneener people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

It is axiomatic that a Governor is—by definition of the job—a person who tends to know a great deal about a little, and not much about a lot.

In this spirit, I generously confide to you that I have minimal knowledge about radiation oncology.

Rather, my business here today is to welcome all delegates—particularly our interstate and international guests—to Tasmania and to your meeting.

I can say though, that both of my parents worked in fields closely related to yours, my father as a diagnostic radiologist and mother, a radiographer. In fact, they met at Sydney Hospital, leading to many family jokes about what went on in the dark room! As a result, I do know a tiny bit about radiology, such as the fact that it was Wilhelm Roentgen who discovered X-rays in 1895 and that one of the first X-rays in history was an X-ray of the hand of Roentgen’s wife. And I do remember my father’s concerns about the use of X-rays in shoe shops to check the fit of shoes; large wooden machines with viewing portholes to look to see how much room you had to wiggle your toes. And I grew up knowing about barium meals and barium enemas with the good fortune of never having either.
When my parents came to live in Tasmania in 1948, radiology was a new specialty and my father was, I think, the first qualified radiologist in Hobart. Recalling this led to me wondering when it was that the potential of radiation was recognised in the treatment of cancer. To my surprise it was soon after the discovery of X-rays and the discovery of natural radioactivity, radium and polonium by Marie and Pierre Curie. In 1899 there was a report of the first case of a malignant skin cancer being cured by the application of radioactivity. Kassabian’s Medical Manual published in 1907 in Philadelphia gives a list of tumours treated by radiotherapy and many of these are still treated with this method although with much more sophisticated equipment. At that time radiotherapy was also recommended in cases completely unjustified according to our present knowledge. For example, it was recommended in the treatment of varicose veins, epilepsy and acne.

I am not sure when oncology came to Australia and New Zealand but I do know that as early as 1925 Dr WP Holman established an oncology based medical practice in Launceston, and the cancer clinics at the Launceston General and the Royal Hobart Hospital bear his name. In fact, the early history of medical practice in Tasmania is an intriguing one. Doctors were in both groups of new settlers who arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in the south and the north in 1804. And there were many colourful character among them. And many pursued other than medical interests, banking, land ownership, judicial office, and politics.

Among the most colourful are the Crowther family, four generations of doctors from 1825 until 1981. The second Dr Crowther, was perhaps the most famous and controversial. As a 16-year-old he was apprenticed to his father for five years and became a partner as a ‘surgeon apothecary and accoucheur’. He was a keen naturalist and when he sailed to England to complete his medical education in 1839, he took with him his collection, including a pair of Tasmanian devils and 493 skins which he sold for a price sufficient to support himself and pay his fees at St Thomas’s Hospital (MRCS, LRCP, 1841) and also for another year of study in Paris.

On his return to Van Diemen’s Land he took over his father’s practice, was appointed to the Tasmanian Court of Medical Examiners and later as one of the four honorary medical officers at the Hobart General Hospital. However, he was suspended from the Hospital because of his involvement in the mutilation for scientific purposes of the body of Aboriginal man, William Lanney.
As well as being a well-recognised surgeon (Crowther published articles in *The Lancet*) he was a naturalist, a speculator owning sawmills and whaling ships, and was active in public affairs and in 1878 became Premier. He had eleven children and enjoyed exercise in open country and bushland, and according to his grandson, the fourth Dr Crowther, walked as a schoolboy 120 miles home for the holidays, which had developed his interest in natural history and the bush.

This grandson, Sir William Edward Lodewyk Hamilton Crowther, was also ‘formidable, in both physique and personality’, and undeterred by the notoriety this had brought his grandfather, an interest in anthropology and Aboriginal human remains. I well remember my father speaking of him, along with the controversial Dr Victor Ratten. As a child I remember hearing that there were tombstones in Hobart with the inscription, ‘Killed by Dr Ratten’, a story one of my University colleagues, also from a medical family remembers hearing as a child. What was about Dr Ratten that inspired such malicious stories among medical families? Did he perhaps make use of radiotherapy in a controversial way? So I have done a little research.

Victor Ratten (1878-1962) obtained his medical qualifications from Harvey Medical College in Chicago in 1907. He was appointed as surgeon superintendent of the Hobart General Hospital in 1917 by the Government after a dispute between the Government and the British Medical Association and its doctors who had withdrawn their services from public hospitals. The BMA questioned Ratten’s medical qualifications but a Royal Commission found them to be genuine despite not following up evidence from Chicago that the Harvey Medical College had closed two years before Ratten was said to have graduated.

Ratten was reputedly a competent surgeon and provided good service to the public. He was loved by the public and the government but hated by many in the medical profession. The dispute continued between the BMA and the Government with threats of court action by the BMA. The Government responded by passing the *Ratten Doubts Revocation Act*, which in effect prevented the Council from seeking to deregister a doctor whose qualifications were fraudulent if the fraud had happened more than seven years previously.

Dr Ratten remained in charge at the Royal Hobart until well into the 1930s and as he lived until 1962 it is not surprising stories about him were still current when I was a growing up.
I have spoken quite enough about the past! Your conference is very much about the present and the future, the wonderful advances that have been made in oncology since the days of Roentgen and Marie Curie. I would like to finish with this quote from Marie Curie taken from her welcoming speech at the opening of the Radium Institute in Warsaw in 1932:

Therapy should be permanently backed up by scientific research without which no progress is possible. Moreover, the search for pure knowledge is one of the important needs of mankind.

To all of you, welcome again, and thank you for inviting me to address you.

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1 A Kulakowski, ‘The contribution of Marie Sklodowska-Curie to the development of modern oncology’ (2011) 400 (6) Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry 1583-1586.
2 WELH Crowther, Crowther, William Lodewyk (1817-1885), Australian Dictionary of Biography.
4 Michael Hodgson, Victor Ratten, The Companion to Tasmanian History.