

Review of the third Cancer Research Workshop by Bridget Robinson

The Canterbury Comprehensive Cancer Centre held its third cancer research workshop on 19 November 2013. As in the two previous workshops, the presenters came from diverse research interests. The programme filled 3 hours with a tea break for networking, and was followed by refreshments and mingling. The audience offered many searching questions and new insights for the presenters.

The first session focused on particular cancers. Mr Jeremy Simcock, a plastic surgeon, demonstrated how although squamous skin cancers are very common and usually are completely cured by being excised, a small number can spread and have a poor prognosis. The challenge is to help general practitioners manage the huge numbers, yet also research why some squamous cancers are much worse and how to recognise them.

Jeremy was followed by Dr Richard Geary, gastroenterologist, who highlighted the slow uptake of screening for our most common cancer, colorectal cancer. A key factor will be quality of the screening colonoscopies performed, ensuring early lesions are not overlooked.

Then research student, Zac Gerring presented a new marker used to stain early breast cancer pathology slides, which may be better than the existing marker for determining prognosis. It will need testing on a much larger group of patients before being considered for use.

The second session explored more general aspects that affect many cancers, not just one type. Sarah Ellery, Oncology Nurse Specialist, reported on her research into factors which impact on educating Oncology patients about their disease and its treatment and side effects.

Emma Spencer, PhD student showed how some new anti-cancer drugs are being designed and modelled on the isothiocyanates, which are found in cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli. The most promising of these will then be tested in cancer models.

Dr Tony Rahman showed how patients with cancer and on chemotherapy have an increased risk of developing blood clots, and these can lead to painful swollen limbs and can also travel to the lungs circulation as pulmonary emboli. He will soon start analysing the blood samples from over 200 cancer patients, to look for a marker that a blood clot is developing.

Anne Smith then gave an excellent overview of the clinical trials run in the Regional Cancer Centre. Details about clinical trials in the South Island can be found through the [Southern Cancer Network website](#).

The third session focused on health issues in our bodies which may make cancer more likely or worse. Dr Jinny Willis described how diabetes patients on insulin are at an increased risk of cancer, perhaps partly because their obesity and physical inactivity are risk factors for cancer.

Dr Anna Pilbrow described a hotspot on DNA which seems to account for an increased risk of heart disease and cancer in some families. It isn't yet known what this gene controls, but the research continues.

Dr Margaret Currie showed early results where fat cells from women made a model of breast cancer resistant to chemotherapy. It is thought that the normal body cells, including the fat cells in the breast, around a cancer may influence the cancer cells by secreting proteins, which they will now test.

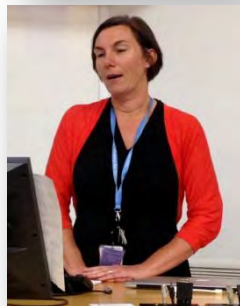
We are grateful to Gabi Dachs and Alice Milnes for organising the workshop.



Networking opportunities at afternoon tea break



A/Prof Richard Geary



Sarah Ellery



Dr Jinny Willis

