



From the PoCoG Executive Office

The first quarter of 2008 has seen a flurry of activity with many projects continuing from the end of last year and many more beginning this year.

Developing research at PoCoG

Our major aim this year is to further develop the PoCoG research program. The primary outcomes for which we are accountable to our funders (Cancer Australia and CINSW) is the number of collaborative projects PoCoG has developed, obtained funding for, and completed.

Protocol approval process

In line with this aim, a protocol approval process through the PoCoG Scientific Advisory Committee, has been established. The purpose of this process is to formally obtain the organisation's approval and support for projects on which PoCoG is named as (one of) the body(ies) either fully or partially responsible for administration of the project. Once approved via this process, PoCoG protocols can receive PoCoG statistical and office support, and are listed as PoCoG protocols on the website. PoCoG approved protocols are led by the investigator who developed the protocol, who retains intellectual ownership over the project. For more information please go to "PoCoG supported research" in the members-only section of our website.

Submission of PoCoG protocols

Four PoCoG approved research proposals were submitted to the NHMRC in March. Two of these proposals were developed in collaboration with other Clinical Trial Groups. These include:

- Psychological morbidity, unmet needs, quality of life and patterns of care in mi-

grant cancer patients: The first year. *Prof. Phyllis Butow CIA*

- Understanding the psychosocial sequelae of surviving testicular cancer. *Prof Ian Olver (ANZGCTG) CIA*
- Reducing psychological morbidity in cancer patients: A systems approach. *Prof. R. Sanson-Fisher CIA*
- Does Palliative Chemotherapy Improve Symptom Control in Women with Recurrent Ovarian Cancer? *M Friedlander (ANZGOG) CIA*

PoCoG Concept Development Workshops

We are also excitedly planning the inaugural PoCoG Concept Development Workshop in May 2008. The purpose of the Concept Development Workshop (CDW) is to bring together PoCoG members and members of the PoCoG Executive and Scientific Advisory Committees to work together on developing new psycho-oncology research concepts. Here at PoCoG we see this event as an exciting opportunity to come together as a co-operative group and work towards developing national studies. Our aim is that this will result in high quality collaborative PoCoG projects, led by the investigator who proposes the concept (and who will retain intellectual ownership over the project).

The concept development workshop will be based on submissions of research ideas from PoCoG members as well as priority areas of research in psycho-oncology identified during focus groups conducted over the

NEW - IN FOCUS

In this edition we feature for the first time a new section of the newsletter—"In Focus" In these sections we are planning to showcase any news or features contributed by our members.



past six months by PoCoG with psychologists, nurses, social workers and other health professionals currently working in oncology across Australia. (The results of the focus groups will be announced shortly). 1-2 page concepts will be presented at the workshop. Attendees will work in small groups to further develop the concepts. Concept investigators will be encouraged to develop a team to further develop the concept, leading to grant submission or implementation.

To maximise the effectiveness of the CDW, the number of delegates will be limited to 40. Delegates will consist of a mixture of the PoCoG Executive and the Scientific Advisory Committee as well as general PoCoG members. PoCoG member delegates will be selected following submission of a research concept. In the event that the number of submissions is greater than the number of places available, a selection committee will make the final decision based on the concept submitted as well as priority areas of research.

The workshop will be held at the Rydges Hotel Camperdown, on 14 May 2008. For more information please visit www.pocog.org.au

PoCoG is aiming to hold regular concept development workshops and at this stage we are working towards holding the next Concept Development Workshop at the COSA Annual Scientific Meeting in November.

Governance

Three key governance documents are nearing completion: the Strategic Plan, the Business Plan and the Policy and Procedures Manual. The development of these documents was a necessary and important step to fulfil Cancer Australia's evaluation framework and principles criteria. The Strategic and Business plans define the purpose of PoCoG as an organisation, outline its aims and goals, and describe a plan of work and key areas of development for PoCoG both in the long and short term. The Policy and Procedures Manual will govern the day to day running of the organisation. All three documents will be shortly available on the PoCoG website.

The restructure of the PoCoG Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

At the recently held PoCoG executive committee meeting in Feb 2008, the committee (including the new Chair of the SAC, Dr Janette Vardy) defined

the roles and responsibilities of the SAC. These definitions will now appear in the PoCoG Policy and Procedures manual and provide clear guidance on the activities of this group.

During this discussion it became clear that the current SAC is too large to function effectively. As the two year term of the current SAC is nearly up, the committee thought it best to dissolve this SAC, and instigate a new process in re-establishing a smaller SAC. The executive committee will convene the new, leaner SAC in time for the new SAC to play an active role in the Concept Development Workshop.

We take this opportunity to thank the outgoing members of the SAC for their participation in, and support for, the inaugural PoCoG SAC.

Development of Associate Membership at PoCoG

PoCoG's membership is growing more international in nature boasting members both in Australia and New Zealand and receiving expressions of interest from individuals elsewhere in the world.

However due to the nature of our new funding agreement with Cancer Australia, we are unable to spend any PoCoG funds to support members who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents. In light of this, PoCoG has created a new category of membership, Associate Membership, in order to accommodate our overseas members. Associate members will have all the rights and benefits of full PoCoG members but will not have access to direct financial support such as travel grants or sponsored workshop attendance.

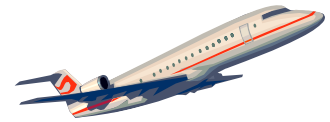
This means that associate members will still be able to take part in the meetings and forums, use the website, receive newsletters and take advantage all PoCoG activities that do not require individual funding.

New Staff Members

Sharon Ceiley has recently commenced her work as Administrative Assistant at PoCoG and joins the team with extensive experience in administration having worked at the University of Sydney as the Administrative Assistant to the Head of the Psychology Department and the Executive Assistant to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Science). She assists the PoCoG staff with a broad knowledge of the University and a wide range of computer and administrative skills.



PoCoG Travel Reimbursement Scheme 2008



The PoCoG is offering the Travel Reimbursement Scheme (TRS) (formerly PoCoG Travel Grants) to support the ongoing professional development of cancer researchers and health professionals in the discipline of Psycho-oncology. The TRS aims to assist PoCoG members to attend national or international conferences, workshops, seminars or other professional development activities.

There are important changes to the policies of this scheme so please make sure you read the guidelines and follow the instructions carefully if you are planning to apply.

The scheme will reimburse activity registration, economy travel expenses and reasonable accom-

modation expenses up to a total value of \$AUS 1500 for national activities (e.g. COSA Annual Scientific Meeting) and \$AUS 4000 for international activities (e.g. International Psycho-oncology Society 10th World Congress). The TRS is open to PoCoG members who are Australian citizens or permanent residents and will be offered in two rounds. For more information please go to www.pocog.org.au

Due to changes in our new funding agreement we are no longer able to offer the Travel Reimbursement Scheme to citizens and residents of New Zealand. We plan to work closely with New Zealand members with the aim of identifying and / se-

News from the Quality of Life Office

The big news at the QOL Office concerns our recent developments in staffing. Applications have now closed for the Cancer Australia Chair in Cancer Quality of Life, and we hope to bring you news of the successful applicant in the next newsletter. About a month ago, we appointed a part-time research assistant, Rachel Zordan, who is working at the QOL Office one day per week. Finally, funding has been agreed for a statistician two days per week - a position that will be advertised shortly.

Preparations are also underway for the QOL Office's strategic planning meeting which is due to take place on Tuesday 13th May. The meeting will be attended by the QOL Advisory Group and will focus on developing research priorities for the years ahead. We would welcome ideas from the PoCoG membership to include in the discussion. PoCoG is delighted that Professor Neil Aaronson from the Netherlands Cancer Institute and EORTC will also be participating in the meeting. Afterwards, Prof Aaronson will give a free public lecture aimed at debunking some of the prevalent myths about HRQoL research. The lecture will be at 3.30 on May 13th in Carslaw Lecture Theatre 275 at the

University of Sydney. We will be making the lecture available via podcast for anyone who is unable to attend in person.

Work on HRQoL-related resources has been ongoing. A draft of our HRQoL Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has been reviewed by the Advisory Group and will be available on the PoCoG website within the next couple of months. Please send us your ideas on how we can improve and add to these FAQs to make them more useful and user-friendly. Rachel Zordan has begun work on a database of measures that will eventually be available online for members to search. The database will include measures not only of HRQoL but also of symptoms, psychological distress, coping and adjustment, and unmet needs.

Finally, we are continuing to promote the work of the QOL Office both through visits to the other COGs and via upcoming presentations at the 13th National Health Outcomes Conference in Canberra (29th April – 1st May) and the Sydney Cancer Conference here at the University of Sydney (25th – 26th July).

PoCoG Vacancy - Biostatistician (part-time)

The Psycho-Oncology Co-operative Research Group (PoCoG) is seeking a suitably qualified part-time Biostatistician to provide statistical advice to members and support to its researchers and other internal and external stakeholders.

For more information please visit our website www.pocog.org.au



News from the CALD study

Unmet Needs Study

The CALD Unmet Needs Study explores unmet needs, psychological distress, quality of life, and patterns of care in Chinese, Arabic, Greek and English speaking cancer patients. In Phase 1 of this study (now complete), we conducted focus groups and interviews with 91 cancer patients and carers about their unmet needs and culture-specific issues in cancer care. Results from Phase 1 fed into the development of the questionnaire to be used in Phase 2 of the study – a population-based national survey of patients recruited through Australian Cancer Registries. The questionnaire is currently being pilot tested and recruitment through the NSW Central Cancer Registry is anticipated to commence in May 2008. We have also developed a companion study exploring (through focus groups and interviews) the role and experience of the interpreter in the oncology consultation.

Prognosis Study

The Prognosis study examines the cultural gaps in communication between patients and cancer specialists, especially in talking about length of life, or 'prognosis'. The project is funded by the National Breast Cancer Foundation and also (from January 2008) the Cure Cancer Foundation Australia. The project also focuses on three of the most widely spoken language communities in Australia – Chinese, Arabic and Greek.

The study involves audio-taping two medical consultations to describe current practice, and a subsequent interview with patients and their families about their experiences and views about ideal communication. While recruitment of CALD patients is challenging, we have identified some important cross-cultural issues in these consultations. Our CALD research team has started working on analysis using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In Focus - The National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers

The National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers was established within Cancer Australia in 2007-08 following recommendations from the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee's report on the Inquiry into Gynaecological Cancer in Australia, Breaking the Silence: a National Voice for Gynaecological Cancers.

The National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers aims to provide national leadership to improve outcomes for women affected by gynaecological cancers, their families and carers. This will be achieved by:

- providing leadership in reducing the impacts of gynaecological cancers;
- building collaboration and partnerships between key stakeholders including consumers, health professionals, researchers, and policy makers;
- building support for gynaecological cancers consumers;
- providing education and increasing awareness among medical and allied health professionals;
- building the evidence base for the control of gynaecological cancers across the cancer control continuum, including through research and clinical trials;
- informing policy development across the cancer control continuum; and
- evaluation of policies and programs.

The National Working Group for Gynaecological Cancers provides expert advice regarding issues and activities relating to gynaecological cancers including the

work of the centre. Projects currently underway include:

- development of a minimum clinical dataset for cervical, endometrial and ovarian cancers;
- development of an accredited online learning activity for general practitioners;
- development of National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers web pages within the Cancer Australia website;
- a review and quality assessment of existing resources for consumers and health professionals;
- a consultation process to identify priority areas for the development of clinical practice guidelines;
- development of a survey to undertake research into patterns of care for gynaecological cancers;
- a review of the gynaecological cancers workforce, including analysis of existing workforce data, identification of gaps in existing data, interviews with the gynaecological cancers workforce and interviews with gynaecological cancer consumers.

The centre is also supporting two grants for gynaecological cancers consumer groups as part of the Building Support Networks grants program.

For further information about the Centre, please contact: Bernie Loughrey, Project Manager, National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers, Ph: 02 6200 1777, email: gynaecentre@canceraustralia.gov.au

For the latest information on our projects, visit: www.gynaecancercentre.gov.au



Who is Who of PoCoG



Name:

Dr Monika Janda

Position:

Research fellow at the Institute for Health and Biomedical Innovation, School of Public Health, Queensland University of Technology

Research interests:

Two main interests: Cancer prevention and early detection and supportive care for cancer patients

Q. Tell us something about yourself

A. Before moving to Australia, I was the clinical psychologist of the radio-oncology department of a tertiary hospital in Vienna, Austria for many years. About 4000 new patients were treated by this department every year and as you can imagine quite a few of them had significant bodily or psychological pain. This inspired me to conduct research to improve the quality of life for people with cancer. In Australia I was lucky to work with two fantastic epidemiologists Prof Beth Newman and Assoc Prof Joanne Aitken on early detection programs for breast and colorectal cancer. Of course, early detection and thus early treatment can have much better quality of life outcomes for patients so it was wonderful to be involved in such important work. It is interesting to assess the motivators and barriers of participating in early detection and fascinating that it is so challenging to change the behaviours of high risk groups

Q. One thing you enjoy most about your work

A. So many interesting new developments happen in cancer research, for example one of my students is exploring associations between genotype and quality of life after cancer, it's great to be part of a thriving research community.

Q. Your professional / psycho-oncology / research pet hate

A. The never-ending story about a cancer-prone personality which despite being disproven so many times seems to pop up again every 5-10 years.

Q. Your favourite quote or motto?

A. Never leave till tomorrow what you can do today.

Q. Which book have you read most recently?

A. Sandra Blakeslee and Matthew Blakeslee: The Body Has a Mind of Its Own.

Q. Your first-ever job

A. Prepare paper-files for microfilming (not sure anyone still knows what a microfilm is?)



In Focus Depression and Cancer Research

beyondblue: the national depression initiative serves to highlight the issue of depression and anxiety and related disorders in the community, with the aim of increasing recognition and pathways to care. Physical illness is of course a strong correlate of, and risk factor for, depression and anxiety, which are common in cancer and a significant contributor to the associated suffering and loss of well-being. *beyondblue* is therefore keenly interested to encourage research that will lead to improved and effective care for people experiencing depression and anxiety.

In 2008 *beyondblue* became a partner with Cancer Australia in the Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme, managed through NHMRC, to fund research in the area of depression and cancer.

In addition, in 2008 *beyondblue* intends to sponsor a supplement of the *Medical Journal of Australia* on the topic of Depression and Physical Illness, with a particular focus on cancer. The timeline for this has not been finalised, but this is an 'advanced notice'. Invitations will shortly go out to people who have publishable research in the area of depression and cancer to submit contributions. Notice will be disseminated via PoCoG and other cancer networks. Further information can be obtained from David Clarke, Research Advisor to *beyondblue*, at david.clarke@med.monash.edu.au.

Useful resources

A discussion group re psycho-oncology is available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/psycho-oncology.html>

The participants post useful resources and links relevant to psychosocial oncology.

The discussion group is hosted by The National Academic Mailing List Service, known as 'JISCmail', and is one of a number of JANET services provided by JANET(UK) (www.ja.net) and funded by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) to benefit learning, teaching and research communities. The Science and Technology Facilities Council (www.scitech.ac.uk) currently operates and develops the JISCmail service on behalf of JANET (UK).



👁 In Focus

NSW MELANOMA NETWORK

Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world. National statistics (2001) rank melanoma as the fourth most common cancer in males and third in females – with incidence rates for NSW ranking melanoma as fourth overall (after colorectal, breast and prostate).

The NSW Melanoma Network is an affiliation of health professionals who, through collaboration, aim to achieve optimal melanoma patient care in NSW with respect to quality, access, convenience and coordination. The grant from NSW Health to establish the Network is held at the University of Sydney within the Faculty of Medicine. The Network, at present, employs six staff to support a range of Network projects including: development of clinical practices guidelines and protocols for melanoma; implementation of a pilot data collection amongst melanoma clinicians; review of the quality and availability of education programs for health professionals in melanoma; evaluation of the completeness of melanoma pathology reports across the state; and measurement of the patient's experience of the care process and pathways through the health system. The Network aims to benchmark quality, accessibility, convenience, and co-ordination of patient services for melanoma and initiate health service improvement activities where required.

While much of the internationally published research on psychosocial aspects of melanoma has been con-

ducted in NSW (e.g. psychological response to disease, and psychosocial indices of survival or relapse outcomes), there is currently little information available on: patients' pathways through the health system; the quality of information provided to patients; psychosocial and other support services accessible to melanoma patients in NSW and consumer evaluations of those same services. The *NSW Melanoma Network* is aiming to address these gaps in knowledge by currently developing and conducting a range of projects including evaluating patterns of care, and concomitant consumer satisfaction, with reference to the NHMRC *Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Melanoma in Australia and New Zealand*, and the *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Psychosocial Care of Adults with Cancer*. A long-term priority is direct feedback of the results of these studies to clinicians involved in primary patient care with a view to improving psychosocial monitoring of patients and service referrals for those with special needs.

For more information about the *NSW Melanoma Network* please contact Dr Phoebe Holt (Manager) or Belinda Goodenough (Research Psychologist), NSW Melanoma Network, Suite 201, 349 Pacific Highway, North Sydney 2060, telephone: 9959-8333, Email: p.holt@melanomanetwork.org.au, b.goodenough@melanomanetwork.org.au.

Sydney Cancer Conference 2008: converting cutting-edge research into revolutionary treatments


SCC2008 will be held from 24 - 26 July 2008 at the Eastern Avenue Auditorium and Lecture Theatre complex at The University of Sydney, under the auspices of The University of Sydney Cancer Research Network.

The theme for SCC2008 is 'Research translation: From innovation to practice', and it will focus on increasing dialogue and the exchange of ideas between basic and clinical researchers, speeding the translation of new discoveries for the benefit of cancer patients.

Of particular interest to PoCoG members will be the psychosocial aspects of cancer stream. Professor Lesley Fallowfield, Director and Professor of Psycho-oncology at the University of Sussex, is one of the keynote speakers. She is known internationally for her research and promotion of the need for health care professionals

to develop better communication skills. Her plenary address will focus on how psycho-oncology helps in the evaluation of clinical trials of cancer therapy.

Psychosocial aspects of cancer sessions within the conference cover communication and decision making, palliative and supportive care, and quality of life. One of these sessions will be a workshop focusing on translation. Confirmed invited national speakers include Professor Martin Tattersall, Professor Phyllis Butow, Professor David Currow, Professor Stewart Dunn.



Basic Biomedical • Clinical • Public Health • Psychosocial

Sydney Cancer Conference 2008

Research Translation: Innovation to practice

25 - 26 July 2008, Eastern Avenue Auditorium
The University of Sydney





Scholarships and Fellowships

RESEARCH INTO PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFESSIONAL'S COMMUNICATION IN ONCOLOGY

SEEKING POTENTIAL RESEARCH STUDENT/ CLINICAL FELLOW FOR RESEARCH PROJECT COMMENCING 2009

We are group of researchers from the School of Psychology, University of Sydney and the Nepean Cancer Centre who are currently seeking funding for a research project to commence in 2009. This research study aims to survey psychosocial clinicians in oncology about their written communication practices with medical staff, and medical staff about their written communication receiving preferences. An additional aim of this study is to pilot test a standard referral feedback template amongst participating psychosocial clinicians. The results of this study will provide evidence-based recommendations to guide psychosocial clinician's written communication with other members of the cancer treatment team.

This is a vital part of the Psycho-Oncology role which is currently under-researched and lacking clinical guidelines.

We are seeking a suitably qualified person who is interested in applying for a post-doctoral scholarship (Masters, Clinical Doctorate or PhD) or a Clinical Fellowship (50% clinical; 50% research role) to work on the proposed project.

We will assist in developing and submitting an application for funding and provide supervision (in collaboration with local staff). The person in this role will have the opportunity to contribute to the design and outcomes of the project and will be first author on all publications.

To find out more about this role. Please contact:

Professor Phyllis Butow
Medical Psychology Research Unit
Brennan MacCallum Building (A18)
(w) 9351 2859
(e) phyllisb@psych.usyd.edu.au

Positions vacant in Psycho-Oncology in Australia

- Research Assistant (Psycho-Oncology); CeMPED; the University of Sydney. Reference No. 125908.
- Website Developer – Health Decision Tools; CeMPED; the University of Sydney. Reference No. 123689.
- Postdoctoral Research Fellow; CeMPED; the University of Sydney. Reference No. 123074.

For more information or to apply online, please visit <http://positions.usyd.edu.au> and search by the reference number.

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