

Cancer Control in New Zealand

Briefing for the Minister of Health, Hon Tony Ryall, from the New Zealand Cancer Control Trust for the meeting on 7 April 2009

The New Zealand Cancer Control Trust

The New Zealand Cancer Control Trust is committed to a planned approach to reducing the burden of cancer in New Zealand. The Trust was the non-Government partner¹ responsible for developing *The New Zealand Cancer Control Strategy* and had a key role in identifying the need for the Cancer Control Council.

Purpose of Paper

The New Zealand Cancer Control Strategy:

- was developed in response to growing public concern about cancer
- is unique among health strategies in that it was mandated by the cancer community
- follows WHO advice that countries like New Zealand that face dramatic increases in the cancer burden should adopt a planned approach to reducing its incidence and impact.

To be effective, a planned approach to control cancer must be refocused and refined on an ongoing basis to ensure the best use of already stretched health resources. This paper briefly outlines the current burden of cancer in New Zealand and priorities for action identified by the Trust. These are to:

- review and revise the Cancer Control Action Plan 2005-2010
- clarify the roles and relationships of cancer control agencies, including the Cancer Control Council
- strengthen national consistency in cancer diagnosis and treatment services.

Cancer in New Zealand

Key facts about cancer in New Zealand:

- Cancer accounts for 29% of all deaths.
- The number of people developing and dying from cancer is increasing.
- In 2005, 18,610 people developed cancer; by 2011 this number is predicted to increase to 22,000.
- The long period (usually many decades) from exposure to cancer causing agents to the development of cancer means that the future case-load is predictable and the health service response can be planned in advance.
- By 2012, lung cancer is expected to surpass breast cancer as the commonest cancer death in women.
- Lymphoma is rapidly increasing in frequency, rising from 545 cases in 1996 to 694 cases in 2005; cases are expected to reach 1197 by 2011.
- Cancer rates are higher among men than women.
- Maori men have the highest cancer death rate in New Zealand.

International Comparisons

¹ The New Zealand Cancer Control Trust was established in 2001 by the Cancer Society of New Zealand and the Child Cancer Foundation. The Trust worked alongside NGOs, health professionals, consumer groups and the Ministry of Health to help ensure broad sector involvement in, and commitment to the Strategy and its initial Action Plan 2005-10 (2005).

Despite improvements in New Zealand over the past 20 years, the death rates of some types of cancer are high by international standards. For example, our bowel cancer rates are the highest in the world. This is likely to remain so as screening, at most, only reduces the risk of death from bowel cancer by up to 15%. Coordinated multiple approaches therefore are needed, including earlier diagnosis and uniform availability of the best treatment. Disparities in survival after a diagnosis of cancer occur for different ethnic groups and different regions in New Zealand, and these could be improved.

Advice of NZCCT

We believe that there remain three key areas which need to be addressed to maintain and enhance the momentum of the past ten years.

Review and Revision of Action Plan

The current Action Plan 2005-2010 is overambitious and does not identify clear priorities and accountabilities, especially for DHBs. For this reason implementation has been inconsistent around the country. Furthermore, each DHB has been expected to develop its own strategic and annual plan for local cancer control. A review and revision of the Action Plan for the medium term by those who are to implement it provides an opportunity for prioritisation of essential activities and for all plans to be aligned as closely as possible.

Such a review has the potential to:

- identify clear priorities
- improve efficiency and make better use of limited resources
- enhance national consistency
- identify more cost-effective approaches to prevention of cancer, including aligning these approaches with other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Clarity of Roles and Relationships

There is a need for greater clarity with respect to the roles of national, regional and district cancer control structures, including DHBs, the Regional Cancer Networks, the Ministry of Health and the Cancer Control Council, and how they interface with each other. In the Trust's view, an independently facilitated review, involving key organisations, should be undertaken to achieve an agreed understanding of:

- their respective roles and responsibilities
- how they interface with one another
- the monitoring and review functions and information requirements of each (to avoid duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy)
- the communication flows, relationships and reporting lines between organisations
- the interface of various national cancer control committees with each other and with the above organisations
- the interface between the Ministry of Health cancer control team and Cancer Control Council secretariat.

Strengthening of Cancer Control Council

The Trust supports the role of the Cancer Control Council to:

- provide leadership and independent advice on cancer control
- monitor and review implementation of the Strategy
- provide strategic advice on the effect of cancer control on cancer incidence, deaths and survival
- link NGO and government sectors in cancer control activities

- identify where new initiatives in cancer control are most likely to make a difference
- advise on improvement of cancer research activity in New Zealand.

A review of roles and relationships of cancer control structures as recommended above provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen the functions of the Council. This includes Council leadership and membership to suit future demands.

Conclusion

While significant achievements in cancer control have been made over the past ten years, New Zealand continues to be faced with a rising number of people with cancer and death rates for some types that are high by international standards. The Government has the chance to shape the future of cancer in New Zealand by ensuring:

- the Action Plan is revised by those in the sector charged with implementing it. Closer collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the DHBs and greater coordination of these agencies with NGOs, including formal agreements, would enhance its implementation.
- greater clarity regarding the roles of national, regional and district cancer control structures
- strengthening of the Cancer Control Council.

As an independent advocate for cancer control with links to international expertise, the Trust would be pleased to offer advice and assistance to Government in addressing these issues.