

CANCER TRIALS NEW ZEALAND

Newsletter



Issue 4 | AUGUST 2007

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Cancer Trials New Zealand (CTNZ) newsletter.

Since our last newsletter CTNZ has been busy on a variety of fronts. One key change for us has been the departure of Greta Riley who as you know, has been here at CTNZ from the beginning. Greta has decided to pursue research in the area of cancer rehabilitation. I have to say a big personal thank you to Greta for being the person who kept CTNZ tracking through the peaks and troughs of those start-up years. I am sure those of you who have worked closely with Greta will join me in congratulating her on the contribution she has made. We are also really delighted to hear that she and her husband Jason are expecting their first baby in February.

We have recently appointed Stephanie Pollard as CTNZ Research Manager. Stephanie worked for a decade or so in the Leeds NCRN Clinical Trials Centre and therefore brings with her a wealth of experience from a very successful network. Stephanie and I will be visiting the cancer centres in the next month or two to update you on what we are up to at CTNZ so you will get a chance to meet her if you haven't already.

I also must thank Blair Dickman for creating continuity during these comings and goings. Blair recently took a job in a New Zealand-based biotech. Gunther Kothen is soon to leave to work with SIRTEX to pursue his passion in training. Gunther will continue to keep in touch with CTNZ regarding any opportunities we can develop using his expertise.

We have reached another phase in the CTNZ progression with the completion of recruitment of two of our trials and now working on data cleaning and analysis. We continue with some translational studies and also have some new ones in various stages of development.

► BIG HEARTS CHARITY BALL

Once again the 'Big Hearts Charity Ball' took off on Valentine's Day 2007 in Hamilton. Just as in 2006 the organising committee chaired by Lisa Clausen did a wonderful job in creating an enjoyable evening with lots of fun for everybody involved. Local and national sponsors contributed generously to this event and the auction of gifted items was exciting as well as entertaining. The auctioneer, more familiar with selling properties sometimes accidentally added a 'thousand' to a given bid which created a real atmosphere. CTNZ as the beneficiary for the second year was represented by Mike Findlay. The University of Auckland, represented by the Dean Iain Martin, contributed by taking two tables and their guests participated in the auction.

The donation from the evening and their sponsors will definitely help CTNZ in working towards supporting, facilitating and fostering Cancer Clinical Research in New Zealand. We much appreciate this support and want to thank the organising committee as well as all sponsors and guests for their contribution. We look forward to seeing you at the 'Big Hearts Charity Ball 2008'.

On the big-picture front, CTNZ ran a symposium in Auckland in February with guest speakers from the UK and Australia. You can read more about this in the newsletter.

Funding CTNZ activities as usual requires steadfast support from multiple sources – primarily the Auckland Division of the Cancer Society of New Zealand with additional support from Roche Products NZ and Novartis Australia. I am also delighted that we have had support from a community fund-raising source in the form of the Big Hearts Charity – which for 2 years have organised a fundraising ball in support of CTNZ. They have done extraordinarily well in their first two years and so in addition to our thanks we wish them the best with their new causes which they adopt on a biennial basis.

CTNZ wants to thank all of you for the productive collaboration so far. I would like to emphasise our continued commitment in helping you with your research studies and improving the environment in which we are all working.

Professor Michael Findlay
Director, CTNZ



Mike and Stephanie take time out to thank the Big Hearts Organising Committee
Photo left to right: Mike Findlay, Stephanie Pollard, Lisa Clausen, Lynette Flowers, Karen Lovegrove, Wendy Bright, Kingsley Field, Amanda Graham



▶ CTNZ TRIALS COMPLETED RECRUITMENT

A huge thank you to all 6 cancer centres participating in the XEN and Cyclox II trials.

The Cyclox II trial closed to recruitment in March 2007. Eighty-two patients were recruited. The XEN study closed to recruitment in June 2007. Forty nine patients were recruited.

We will now be entering a very busy time as we prepare the data for analyses and coordinate abstract submission. The continuing support of the participating centres at this time is crucial and we appreciate the efforts made in ensuring timely data collection, completing tumour assessments and prompt resolution of queries.

▶ NEW TRIAL OPENING SOON

We are in the final process of getting a new industry sponsored trial started in New Zealand with different sites participating. The SIRFLOX trial compares the outcome for patients with metastatic colorectal cancer who are either treated first line with FOLFOX 6m alone or with FOLFOX 6m plus Selective Internal Radiation Therapy (SIRT). SIRT has shown promising results in the treatment of liver metastasis and primary liver cancer already. A small pilot phase II trial has indicated safety and efficacy in combination with FOLFOX which now needs to be confirmed in this larger international trial. The trial aims to recruit more than 300 patients worldwide.

▶ STRATEGY

Recently we have put some work into our strategy, mostly to provide a clearer picture of our vision and goals as well as making CTNZ more sustainable.

The vision emphasises the overall motivation for why we are doing what we do and what we want to achieve for the future:

Vision:

Providing patients with the best treatment outcome by continuous improvement of quality, efficacy and efficiency of cancer care through research

The mission expresses broadly what we want to do to realise our vision. In consequence the mission is action orientated and summarises our goals.

Mission:

Promote, support, initiate and facilitate research within the cancer control continuum

Our key goals are to support cancer clinical trials researchers all over New Zealand with all aspects of a trial – from protocol development to data analysis – and to foster cancer clinical trials research and collaboration.

▶ CTNZ STUDIES

Hi 5 Study – Professor Bruce Baguley, Dr Dragan Damianovich
Funding – Genesis Oncology Trust

XEN – Professor Michael Findlay Funding - Roche Products (NZ) Ltd

CYCLOX II - Clinical Assoc Prof Vernon Harvey, Prof Michael Findlay
Funding, Research Grant - Roche Products (NZ) Ltd

CYP2C19 study – Dr Nuala Helsby
Funding – Cancer Society of NZ

Cancer Colorectal Journey - Dr Julie Brown
Funding - Genesis Oncology Trust

▶ STAFF CHANGES

Greta Riley who was with CTNZ from the very beginning has decided to move on. Greta has done an awesome job in building CTNZ and has achieved something she can be proud of. We all want to thank Greta for her motivated work, dedication and the time she put into this. Greta is still with us on a part time basis until the end of September but also spends time at Auckland University of Technology.

Blair Dickman left CTNZ in June to pursue a career opportunity with a NZ Biotech. He was with us as Clinical Research Associate for almost 2 years and mostly responsible for the XEN and Cyclox II trials. We are still pretty busy filling the gaps Blair left behind however we would like to wish him good luck with his future professional development.

Gunther Kothen is leaving CTNZ in August having been with us on a part time basis for more than a year now in various functions. He is following his training passion but will still be working on the training project plan and funding concept on a voluntary basis. We greatly appreciate Gunther's continuing commitment to CTNZ and to the research workforce in New Zealand.

Melissa Murray who worked on the different trials in data management and trial coordination is going on her 'Big OE' to London in September this year. Melissa has been a dedicated and enthusiastic contributor to the CTNZ studies and we hope to see her back with CTNZ some day.

Stephanie Pollard joined CTNZ in June as Research Manager. Stephanie comes from the UK where she worked for the Clinical Trials Research Unit (an accredited National Cancer Research Network trials unit). She developed and managed national and international cancer clinical trials for nearly a decade. In addition to this long standing role Stephanie also gained experience within the pharmaceutical industry having worked for both Covance and Roche Products (NZ) Ltd.

Veronica Latham joined CTNZ in June as a part time research nurse. She will be working on the SIRFLOX study will also do some data management work on the breast radiation audit as well as Hi5 and CYP2C19.

Janfrey Doak returned from maternity leave in February and represents CTNZ in Christchurch doing project development and some data management on the breast radiation audit. Janfrey is working part time and is based at Christchurch Hospital.

Welcome back Janfrey and welcome aboard Stephanie and Veronica!

▶ CTNZ SYMPOSIUM 'RESEARCH DRIVEN CANCER CARE'

IS THERE A FUTURE FOR CANCER CLINICAL TRIALS RESEARCH IN NEW ZEALAND?

To explore and discuss the value of clinical trials research in cancer care and to inform a research driven cancer care strategy for New Zealand, CTNZ organised a symposium in February this year. During the symposium the three overseas guest speakers Professor Peter Selby (Joint Director of the UK Clinical Research Network), Professor Jim Bishop (Chief Cancer Officer, CEO, Cancer Institute NSW) and Professor John Simes (NHMRC Clinical Trials Centre, University of Sydney, NSW) gave quite a comprehensive perspective on how Cancer Clinical Trials Research is valued in the UK and Australia. There was a clear consensus that clinical trials research adds value for patients, clinicians, the community as well as the institutions.

"Clinical Trials research is just as important as funding other healthcare interventions"
(J.Simes)

"a clinical research structure improves the pattern of care and the quality of services provided"
(P.Selby)

"It is estimated that every \$1 spent on medical R&D will return \$5 in economic benefit"
(J.Bishop)

It was interesting to learn about the success of the UK Clinical Research Network (UKCRN), which was built on the National Cancer Research Network (NCRN) within 6 years.

Professor John Gavin (Executive Director of the Cancer Control Trust and member of the Cancer Control Council) gave a presentation on behalf of the CCC.

Research is valued in the cancer control strategy. The CCC plans to develop a 5 year rolling research plan. The distribution of funds across the research continuum however, is seen by the CCC as unequal with the need to rebalance investment.

Professor Michael Findlay (Director CTNZ) gave an overview on how Cancer Clinical Trials Research is seen and valued in New Zealand. Medical oncology cancer clinical trials research is currently done at 6 centres in New Zealand which are all hosted on DHB sites. 2-8 staff per site manage 10-25 active studies per site and all research units are funded on study income and charitable sources.

A subsequent SWOT analysis by Dr Mark Jeffrey (Medical Oncologist, Christchurch) and Professor Iain Martin (Dean of the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, The University of Auckland) revealed that workforce, patient population and environment in New Zealand imply strength and opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats.

It was pointed out more than once that it is important to value cancer clinical trials research. The need to change the research culture in New Zealand was identified, building on the strength which is already there.

Gunther Kothen, on behalf of CTNZ reported back from this symposium at the New Zealand Society of Oncology conference in Dunedin and the NZACRes conference in July. We are currently working on a more detailed summary report which should be finished by September, when it will be circulated in draft form for comment.

▶ COOPERATION WITH COSA TOWARDS A TRAINING INITIATIVE

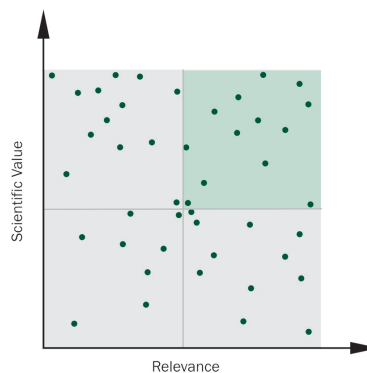
We are currently working with the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) and ANZ cooperative trials groups on a training programme. The aim is to cover GCP and regulatory issues and their consequences for daily work. This will be tailored towards the Australian and New Zealand regulatory requirements. The concept is based on a 'blended learning' approach with face to face training as well as electronically based training modules. We want to offer different modules covering the diverse issues around clinical trials. This will enable us to offer training for all target groups – from the novice to the experienced. We also aim to make at least the basic training available regularly to help newcomers get started when needed. This is certainly a very ambitious approach but we feel it is an important project. Key questions at this early stage are the funding model and the technical feasibility of features like web based training modules. So, watch this space.

▶ REPORT BACK FROM "WHAT THE HRC HAS BEEN DOING AND WHERE IT IS GOING"

On 24 August the new Chief Executive of the HRC, Dr Robins Olds, introduced himself and his vision at Auckland University. Dr Robins Olds joined the HRC as Chief Executive in May 2007. Prior to this, Dr Olds was Professor of Pathology and Head of Department at the University of Otago. He has a significant track record as a productive researcher in New Zealand and the United Kingdom with an overarching research interest in the molecular genetics of human disease.

Dr Olds provided an illuminating description of the HRC's 'dual masters', namely that the Ministry of Health sets the research priority areas whilst the Ministry of Science Research Technology provides the funding.

It was noted that over the last few years overall HRC funding had increased with the distribution of funding remaining constant. However, projects were more expensive and thus only 12% of the clinical research projects submitted in the last round were funded. He strongly emphasized that in order for projects to be successful in obtaining HRC funding that they had to be strong in both their science AND their relevance and the HRC have a scoring system which addresses this.



HRC ANNUAL FUNDING ROUND – KEY DATES

3 September 2007: Annual Funding Round – Expression of interest submission (programme)

1 October 2007: Annual Funding Round – Initial Registration (projects, feasibility studies, programmes)

1 November 2007: Annual Funding Round – Full submission (projects, feasibility studies, programmes)

Full information on grants and HRC funding calendar available at <http://www.hrc.govt.nz>

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► MEETING ALERTS

2007 ASIA PACIFIC SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS

9th Australian Palliative Care Conference

Melbourne Convention Centre

Tuesday 28 - Friday 31 August 2007

Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Radiologists

58th Annual Scientific Meeting

Melbourne, Australia

4-7 October 2007

Australasian Gastro-Intestinal Trials Group (AGITG)

9th Annual Scientific Meeting

Melbourne, Australia

17-19 October 2007

2007 ASIA PACIFIC CLINICAL TRIALS MEETINGS

Patient Recruitment and Retention in Clinical Trials

Grand Copthorne, Singapore,

September 4 - 7, 2007

International Clinical Trials Symposium 2007,

Sydney, Australia

23-26 Sept 07

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