

Collaboration Adds Value: The experience of the Cancer Information and Support Service, the Cancer Society of New Zealand, Wellington Division.

While a friendly rivalry exists in many spheres of life between New Zealand and our near-neighbour Australia, at the Cancer Information and Support Service, Cancer Society of New Zealand, Wellington Division, we have found the opposite to be true. Our service has benefited greatly from the close relationship we enjoy with the Australian State Cancer Councils particularly the Cancer Council Victoria (TCCV). This relationship has been forged over a decade and a half, and has been reliant on good liaison and personal networking, and on the generosity and inclusiveness of TCCV personnel.

A highlight for us was the purchase, in 1999, of the OnCall database from TCCV. We use this to record our calls to the Cancer Information Service, as well as our publications and services database.

We have been fortunate to have Doreen Akkerman visit from TCCV to update our use of the OnCall database. This year Doreen came to Auckland and met with Cancer Information nurses from the three New Zealand centres offering a Cancer Information Service via the national free-phone number – Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Doreen is always generous in sharing her resources, good humour and expertise.

In 2000, we were invited to attend the first meeting of the Australian Cancer Information Service managers, held in Adelaide. This meeting has continued to be held annually on the day prior to the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA). At the Adelaide meeting we formed an email network group, which entails monthly contact via an e-newsletter. We also designed the first step in a three-year national survey of CIS caller profiles.

Attendance at this meeting and participating in the email network has been of huge benefit to our service for several reasons. We are passionate about the provision of high-quality, easily accessible, culturally sensitive and appropriate cancer information offering a range of access and delivery options. However, when working in a small service it is easy to feel isolated, therefore the peer support gained from this contact with the Australian group is of immense value. It is an effective means of connection to the wider world of cancer information provision, and is a great vehicle for gleaning new ideas for resource development and service promotion, and overall increases job satisfaction.

In 2003, we adapted the online forum CancerChat from the Cancer Council of Western Australia, which is growing in popularity. We have found that people use it equally for asking questions, and for seeking support and responding to the messages of other users.

Another important example of collaboration has been the introduction to New Zealand of the Australian support programme Cancer Connect now adapted for NZ as Cancer ConnectNZ. Trainers from TCCV came to New Zealand to train our first batch of volunteers and this programme goes from strength to strength. It gives us another important source of support to offer those who contact us. Volunteers from New Zealand are available to be used for Australian callers and vice-versa.

We have recently conducted a user satisfaction survey of our Cancer Information Service and for this we were grateful to have the experiences of other Cancer Councils to draw on. The Cancer Council South Australia shared their survey questionnaire as indeed did CancerBacup (UK). In turn we are pleased to offer what worked for us to anyone else interested.

In conclusion collaboration is mutually beneficial and we believe adds value to a Cancer Information and Support Service in enabling more effective provision of high-quality cancer information and support to those affected by cancer. In addition the workforce benefits are significant.

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