One stop for cancer care

Dr Joanne Curry, with Dr Ante Prodan and Professor Anneke Fitzgerald, is researching ways to ensure patients at a new integrated cancer centre move smoothly from one specialist service to the next. Funding for the project comes from Hunter New England Local Health District, which is establishing the North West Cancer Centre in Tamworth.

'The regional cancer centre will provide: cancer treatment services closer to home, more effective use of valuable resources with a higher standard of care, and an inviting environment in which to build a critical mass of health care providers,' says Dr Curry. 'The people of Tamworth and environs will have access to a 'one-stop' setting providing radiation and medical oncology, haematology and palliative care services. We will focus on the design of an integrated system of care for cancer patients, so the treatment they receive is timely, equitable and collaborative, and use predictive modelling to give management the information it needs to forecast workforce and equipment requirements.'

For such a technology-driven project, the researchers will begin by going back to basics, using butchers paper, coloured pens and sticky notes in a pioneering patient modelling technique called Essomenic. At workshops, the team will collaborate with health service staff to illustrate a patient’s multi-disciplinary journey from “Day 1”. Services that need to link in with the centre, such as transport and external diagnostic services, are identified, and the impact of the innovations on staff and management analysed. Eventually the on-paper story is transferred to the Essomenic modelling software.

Importantly, the research has the scope to look not just at patients physically present at the centre’s specialist services, but to take into account patients using Telehealth clinics. It can identify critical IT “touch points” which would benefit from increased technical support. Those touch points might include online access to clinical guidelines, external test results or historical patient records.

This heavily interactive research, involving frequent dialogue with health service staff, will deliver the first comprehensive picture of the end-to-end cancer patient journey. The patient-centered graphical models will have implications beyond the Hunter region for best practice cancer care and health funding.

Project Title: Using predictive modelling to optimise the patient journey for the North West Cancer Centre, Tamworth
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Contact Details: j.curry@uws.edu.au
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