



Cancer control in the Pacific: A South Pacific collaborative approach



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 February 2017

Received in revised form 25 May 2017

Accepted 1 June 2017

Keywords:

Cancer epidemic control

Pacific

Collaboration

1. Introduction to the pacific islands region

The Pacific island countries and territories (PICTs) are scattered over an ocean area, 165 million square kilometres. There are 22 PICTs who are Members States in the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region and the Pacific Community (SPC), two leading scientific and technical organizations in the Pacific region: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated State of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna [1], indicated in the map. Most of the northern hemisphere Pacific islands have ties with the U.S.A. to some extent (U.S.-affiliated Pacific islands; USAPIs), while southern PICTs are a mixture of developing sovereign nations or self-governing territories of larger nations such as New Zealand, France or the United Kingdom. Australia also holds influence in the region.

The PICTs are culturally diverse, separated roughly into three geo-cultural groups: Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian peoples, who have a mixture of cultural customs, languages and beliefs. In the southern region, the sovereign country of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest PICT with approximately 8.1 million people and is challenged to provide adequate health services through reduced health expenditure in recent years. New

Caledonia, supported by France, provides a more advanced and resourced service in a country of 272,700 people. Tokelau is the smallest PICT with approximately 1160 people, and is mostly reliant on out of country medical referrals, even for diagnosis [1,2]. Pacific peoples have acquired the associated risk factors for cancer and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The western economy and lifestyle has shaped the demographic and epidemiological transition in the PICTs. The epidemic proportions of the so-called diseases of affluence, NCDs, now sit on top of an unfinished and re-emerging agenda of Communicable Diseases (CDs).

Cancer is a significant and growing problem in the Pacific. Through convention, population health planners have housed cancer control under NCD prevention and control, the result being that cancer has become overshadowed by other diseases in NCDs programmes which includes cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory illnesses. The high rates of cervical cancer and liver cancer in the Pacific however indicates the important role of CDs (CDs) in the prevention and control strategies of certain cancers. At the same time breast cancer represented a significant cancer burden among women and lung cancer as the most important cancer burden among men in a previous study in four PICTs [3], with prostate cancer having been reported as the second most common cancer among men in at least two and the leading cancer in two other PICTs [3,4]. Environmental risk factors for cancer are also well documented as well as specific exposures such as a history of significant exposure to ionizing radiation from thermonuclear weapons testing, unique to the Pacific islands. The long latency period for some radiation-induced cancers must be acknowledged in an environment of poor quality data [5,6]. This raises the importance of research in the above exposures linked to cancers which are not well studied in the Pacific including studies

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Table 1
A shortlist of potential stakeholders and partners in cancer control in the south Pacific.

Position	Stakeholder	Area	
Local	Faith based organisations	Health promotion	
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Treatment	
	Private health care providers	All	
	Private laboratories	Diagnosis	
	Ministry of Finance	All	
	Private businesses e.g. banks, retail	All	
	Education institutions	Capacity-building	
	Cancer societies/support organisations	All	
	PNG National Cancer Treatment Centre	Treatment	
	International	Overseas universities and university hospitals	Capacity-building
Hospital networks		Treatment	
Existing overseas referral destinations		Treatment	
Medical tourism operators/investors		Treatment	
Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade/Fiji & Tonga Health Sector Support Programmes		Health promotion, prevention & screening	
Indian Development Partnership Administration		Potentially any	
Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)		Potentially any	
Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund		Potentially any	
China Aid		Potentially any	
NZ Aid Programme (MFAT)		Potentially any	
Japan International Cooperation Agency		Health promotion	
USAID and US Department of Defence		Treatment	
EuropeAid		Potentially any	
Agence Française de Développement		Potentially any	
Overseas cancer centres		Staff training	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korea National Cancer Centre • Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre • Centre Radiotherapie de Nouvelle Caledonie 		Capacity building, expertise, treatment	
PICT Ministries/Departments of Health		Advocacy, capacity building	
Medical technology manufacturers and distributors		Clinical services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varian Medical Systems • Elekta • GE Healthcare • Siemens • Neusoft Co. • Shinva Medical Instrument Co. • Philips Radiation Oncology 			
Chemotherapy product manufacturers		Clinical products	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cipla limited (India) • Intas pharmaceuticals Ltd. • Biochem pharmaceutical industries • Baxter pharmaceutical 			
Practitioner societies		Capacity building, expertise, training	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Institute of Radiography • American Society for Radiation Oncology • European Society for Radiation Oncology • Royal Australian College of Surgeons • Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists • Pacific Medical Association • Pacific Islands Health Officers' Association 			
Regional		World Health Organisation (South Pacific Office)	Various
		Asian Development Bank	Various (Finance)
		Secretariat of the Pacific Community	Pre-clinical
		Cancer Council of the Pacific Islands	Advocacy, expertise
	SSCSIP: Strengthening Specialised Clinical Services in the Pacific	Clinical services	
Global	World Bank	Various (finance)	
	New Development Bank	Various (finance)	
	Union for International Cancer Control	Various	
	International Agency for Research on Cancer	Data management, staff training	
	United Nations Development Programme	Various	
	Small Island Developing States Network	Potentially any	
	Gates foundation	Pre-clinical and advocacy	
	International Network for Cancer Treatment and Research	Capacity building, research	
	Axios International	Capacity building, advocacy	
	World Child Cancer	Capacity building, diagnosis, treatment	
	International Atomic Energy Agency		

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