Psycho-oncology Co-operative Research Group (PoCoG): A New ‘Quality of Life Office’ to Support Australian Cancer Clinical Trials

Background
Psycho-oncology Co-operative Research Group (PoCoG)

The Psycho-oncology Co-operative Research Group (PoCoG) is one of 13 national co-operative oncology research groups (COGs) developed under the auspices of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA). PoCoG’s aims are to develop collaborative, large-scale, multi-centre psycho-oncology studies of clinical relevance and importance and to support the development of widespread expertise in psycho-oncology among Australian researchers.

Measuring quality of life in cancer clinical trials

Along with survival, health-related quality of life (HRQoL) is now mandated as the most important outcome in cancer clinical trials. However, the measurement, analysis and interpretation of HRQoL outcomes are often of inadequate quality to inform clinical practice. The patient reported nature of HRQoL data places special demands on trial design and methodology.

PoCoG’s Quality of Life Office

Over the past year, PoCoG has been developing a Quality of Life Office to support appropriate, valid, rigorous and patient-centred HRQoL assessment by the COGs and PoCoG members. Funding has been provided by Cancer Australia and the Cancer Institute NSW. The Office is currently establishing:

- a resource library containing relevant questionnaires (with manuals, interpretation guidelines and references) and HRQoL-related literature;
- a website with frequently asked questions (FAQs), protocol templates and relevant links (www.pocog.org.au/). FAQs will offer introductory advice on the measurement, analysis and reporting of HRQoL, as well as information on HRQoL issues and disease-specific measures pertinent to each cancer type;
- support in the analysis and interpretation of HRQoL data;
- a program of research, including collaborations with the national COGs.
These activities will be supported by the creation in mid-2008 of a **Cancer Australia Chair in Cancer Quality of Life**. The Chair is being funded to promote consistency in the measurement and analysis of HRQoL across trials groups wherever appropriate, and to create research networks, locally and globally.

**Research program**

Led by the Cancer Australia Chair in Cancer Quality of life, it is anticipated that the Quality of Life Office’s program of research may include:
- intervention studies with HRQoL as a primary or secondary outcome (e.g., pharmaceutical, medical, psychological, exercise);
- intervention studies which examine clinical use of HRQoL questionnaires to improve process and outcomes of cancer care;
- methodological research about HRQoL (e.g., cross-cultural interpretation; response shift, responsiveness);
- descriptive studies in which HRQoL is an outcome (e.g., models of care in cancer) or is more clearly defined by cancer patients;
- studies examining ways to get HRQoL evidence into practice.

**Management and operation**

Daily operations of the Quality of Life Office are supported by a full-time project manager, Dr Tim Luckett, working collaboratively with visiting scholar A/Prof Madeleine King and the PoCoG staff and Executive Committee. To ensure that the Quality of Life Office is optimally useful and productive, PoCoG has been seeking advice from the COGs and PoCoG membership regarding their HRQOL-related information needs and ideas for collaboration. An advisory group has been formed and is meeting twice yearly to monitor progress and advise on strategic directions.

**Contact information**

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