

From the Principal Investigator

Amanda Landers



Welcome to the ASPERT Research Group Bulletin. Over the last 9 years we have been studying pancreatic cancer and pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy. Interest in this area of medicine is growing. This first edition is going out to those who have been part of former research or conversations about future studies. Please feel free forward the bulletin to anyone else you know who might be interested in subscribing.

The ASPERT Study is a collaboration between investigators at the University of Otago, University of Auckland, and Cancer Symptom Trials (CST) at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

The ASPERT Bulletin will keep subscribers up to date with work in progress, publications, and opportunities to get involved. The next bulletin will highlight the current work that is happening in this space.

A word from our dietitian



**Helen Brown, Palliative Care dietitian,
Nurse Maude Hospice Palliative Care
service, Christchurch, NZ**

I became aware of referrals from District Nurses for patients with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer that were suffering weight loss. On assessing these patients it was apparent that they were likely to be malabsorbing. Some of these patients had been prescribed PERT at diagnosis but told they would not need to start it yet. Patients had little understanding of the role it played in their management.

From here I held education sessions with our specialist team and district nursing providers. Our research team was born from these education sessions.

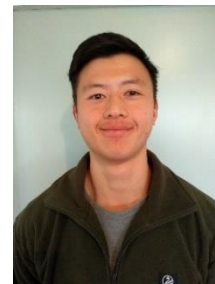
Our first paper (2016) was a retrospective audit of patients notes referred to our service between January 2010 and July 2012, looking for recorded symptoms of malabsorption and treatment offered. The results of this study showed only 21% of patients were prescribed Creon despite many malabsorption symptoms.

In 2018 we carried out a prospective pilot study on the effectiveness of PERT for malabsorption in advanced pancreatic cancer. The results of this study showed statistically significant improvement in pancreatic pain, bowel symptoms and bloating plus a trend toward improvement in digestive symptoms.

We published a qualitative study (2020) into patients' perceptions of PERT. Patients with a diagnosis of advanced pancreatic cancer were provided with PERT education and diet counselling. Results showed patient education, diet counselling and consideration of patients' past experience with pancreatic cancer played a pivotal role in supporting patients to self-manage their PERT. It also improved the patients experience with food, allowing better choice and enjoyment.

In cancer care it is so important we work as a multidisciplinary team for the benefit of our patients. In pancreatic cancer this is even more critical due to the poor prognosis and range of symptoms that can greatly impact on the patients' quality of life. We believe pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy is a safe and successful treatment when offered appropriately and it is our responsibility as health professionals to offer best practice.

Summer student researcher update



**Sebastian On,
Medical Student
University of
Otago
Christchurch, NZ**

Before starting research with the ASPERT RG, I was not aware of PERT's utility in advanced pancreatic cancer. I've since learnt about the symptoms of malabsorption such as steatorrhoea, bloating, abdominal pain and weight loss that can potentially be reduced by using PERT, and I've learnt the importance of correct timing and dosing.

Given the benefits of PERT, it strikes me as bizarre that in Canterbury, New Zealand, only 21% of patients with advanced pancreatic cancer were found to be prescribed PERT. Perhaps the low rate reflects not only a lack of awareness, but also an absence of concrete evidence to support the use of PERT in this context.

It is exciting to be part of a project that could develop both these areas, possibly leading to increasing the use of PERT, which may help to improve quality of life for patients with pancreatic cancer.

Contact us



Subscribe to the ASPERT Bulletin or find out more about the ASPERT study by

emailing Amanda Landers:

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