



MELANOMA RESEARCH AND THERAPY IN NEW ZEALAND: RAISING THE BAR THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Meeting Background and Outcome

Background

Around 60 New Zealand and international melanoma clinicians, scientists and consumers met in Queenstown on 9 September 2017 for the inaugural Melanoma Research and Therapy in New Zealand meeting. The meeting was organised by MelNet, Melanoma New Zealand and the Queenstown Research Week.

Overseas speakers were:

- Professor David Whiteman, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Brisbane: *Melanoma epidemiology and risk assessment*
- Professor Mel Ziman, School of Medical and Health Sciences, Edith Cowan University, Perth: *Blood based biomarkers for diagnosis, prognosis and monitoring of patients with melanoma*
- Professor Mark Shackleton, Alfred Health and Monash University, Melbourne: *Melanoma heterogeneity – the elephant in the room.*

A list of the New Zealand speakers, the programme and speaker abstracts are available on the MelNet website (www.melnet.org.nz).

Meeting summary and outcomes

During the final session, Professor Cris Print observed that most international advances in melanoma diagnosis, treatment and care have required:

- High quality basic molecular and epidemiological research
- High quality clinical research and trials
- Patients bravely participating in research and clinical trials that may not save them.

Research also has identified the overwhelming importance of primary prevention.

While acknowledging New Zealand's strengths in all of these areas, Professor Print highlighted that currently these are geographically scattered and relatively disconnected. It was for these reasons that the meeting had been designed to develop a unified melanoma translational research and clinical trials engine focussed on patients.

Professor Print observed that Paul O'Neil's vision for melanoma research and trials, as set out in his challenge as a consumer to delegates at the outset of the meeting, had been refined by other speakers throughout the day. This vision involves:

- An energised, joined up and innovative research community that incorporates patients at its core
- Removing serendipity from patient pathways, incorporating education, 'health pathways', primary care and new diagnostic technologies for both research and patient care
- Recognising the overwhelming importance of primary prevention
- Addressing specific barriers to translational research and trials, including administrative, political and economic barriers, raising the need for advocacy by patients to introduce DHB KPIs.

Professor Print identified the following potential goals to initiate delegate discussion:

- Formation of a national special interest group
- A more politically active consumer advocacy group
- Development of more clinical fellowship roles in melanoma
- Report on progress to a Queenstown Melanoma Meeting in 2018 and/or to the Melanoma Summit in November 2018
- A paper submitted describing this meeting's outcome
- At least one new clinical trial in 2018
- A patient-owned web resource in partnership with research
- A national melanoma research coordinator role
- Submission of a collaborative melanoma program grant application to the HRC in 2018
- Champions in different organisations
- Most importantly, the resources to fund work towards these goals.

Delegate/speaker points of discussion were as follows:

- Australia/New Zealand Melanoma Trials Group (ANZMTG) can assist in patient advocacy issues/approaches
- Clinicians in New Zealand are overwhelmed with their clinical workload; as a melanoma clinical trials coordinator is unlikely to be established for some time, perhaps someone who knows the clinical and research worlds and who does not have a full-time position could be identified
- The Maurice Wilkins Centre would like to assume a greater role in principle
- Identifying/initiating one clinical trial by a group of interested researchers/clinicians is an important starting point
- While some expressed reservations about the involvement of pharma, others stressed the need for them to be part of the conversation and solution
- Existing models outside New Zealand should be considered
- As an umbrella network of professionals working in melanoma, MelNet is willing to commit resources to further exploring proposed actions by hosting a meeting of those interested in establishing a melanoma research and therapy special interest group
- ANZMTG is able to offer advice and assistance as well as infrastructure, e.g., to get a clinical trial up and running; this could involve increased New Zealand representation on the ANZMTG advisory board
- There is a need for a stronger consumer advocacy in melanoma

- Melanoma New Zealand has an important role in supporting consumer involvement.

Next steps

As a next step in addressing the above recommendations, MelNet has agreed to fund a meeting to establish a melanoma research and therapy special interest group. The half-day meeting starting at noon will be held at the Novotel at Auckland International Airport on Friday 8 December. All those with a special interest in melanoma research and therapy, including scientists, oncologists, pathologists, radiologists, clinical nurse specialists and surgeons, are invited to attend. Further details, including other recommendations to be addressed, will be included in upcoming MelNet e-updates and posted on the MelNet website.

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