Developing a sustainable model of service delivery for oncology services in regional Australia: case example

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Although outcomes for Australian cancer patients have seen dramatic improvements over the past 20 years, there remains an unacceptable variation in cancer outcomes for certain communities. These include those from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, those from a rural area and those from a lower socioeconomic group.

Around 32% of the Australian population live outside state capital cities. Patients with cancer from rural and remote areas are diagnosed later than those in the city, and are more likely to die from cancers such as lung, cervical and uterine cancer the further they live from major cities.

There are clear deficiencies in cancer service availability in regional and rural Australia. The increasing lack of specialist cancer services and expertise with increasing remoteness correlates with the patterns for cancer morbidity and mortality.

This raises the challenge of overcoming the unique issues in delivery of oncology services in regional Australia.

Cancer treatment in rural areas has often been fragmented and involved long travel between services and time away from home, work and loved ones for patients receiving treatment.

This presentation will use a patient example to explore the development of a sustainable model of service delivery within the Border/East Hume region in northern Victoria and southern NSW. The model is designed to coordinate the patients’ care from different services and allow them access to the highest quality care closer to home.

The multidisciplinary team/cancer network model used in this region has attempted to overcome the issues of division across boundaries, including professional, state border and public and private. It has worked to implement linked cancer networks focused on the needs of the patient and their families.
The system also has benefits for practitioners, making it easier for them to work with and refer to different services. It also gives opportunities to work in public, private and research fields, thus attracting specialists bringing further expertise and making this a sustainable model.

This presentation will illustrate the benefits and limitations of this model, which is highly regarded as an example that could be used in the delivery of cancer services both in regional Australia and even metropolitan areas. The presentation will take into account views from stakeholders, including oncologists, other health professionals and patients.