

SMICS Communication Skills Training Program



Purpose

The purpose of the project is to enhance the communication skills of the cancer workforce within the SMICS region by:

- the adaptation and development of a core set of communication skills workshops
- the training and up-skilling of workshop facilitators
- offering a series of communication skills workshops across the SMICS region
- the piloting of a mentoring program at Southern Health

Background and current situation

Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Service (SMICS) was established in 2004 to help facilitate the implementation of the Cancer Services Framework for Victoria and Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-2011 in southern Melbourne. It is a joint initiative involving Alfred Health, Cabrini Health, Peninsula Health and Southern Health. SMICS considers that collaboration with a range of stakeholders is key to achieving several long-term objectives. Two of these objectives include:

- All patients receiving cancer treatment can access appropriate psychosocial care that is consistent with the *Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Psychosocial Care of Adults with Cancer*
- *By 2012 we will provide evidence of training the cancer workforce in supportive care screening processes and survivorship awareness!*

There is substantial evidence that effective communication in cancer care can positively impact on a number of patient outcomes, including their quality of life, satisfaction with care, decision - making and psychosocial distress^{ii iii}. With this in mind the Cancer Council Victoria (CCV) has developed the evidence based *Victorian Cancer Clinicians Communication Program*, which is aimed at enhancing the quality of clinician-patient communication. SMICS has been supporting this program through organising and promoting a series of Breaking Bad News Workshops since 2006. These physician focused workshops are delivered by specially trained facilitators and are highly valued by the clinicians who attend.

Southern Health Pilot

During 2011 SMICS offered a series of 4 streamlined Discussing Bad News with Patients and Families workshops within Southern Health. These workshops were open to all health professionals which resulted in a high demand with 26 health professionals from various disciplines attending. The overall response was extremely positive with all those participating stating that they would recommend the workshops to other health care clinicians and that their confidence in discussing bad news had increased.

It has been proposed that SMICS assist with the expansion of the Southern Health program to include additional workshops, a mentoring program and the promotion of a similar program within Alfred Health and Peninsula Health throughout 2012.

Aim

The aim is to assist health professionals in addressing the supportive care needs of health service consumers. The following workshops will be offered:

- Discussing bad news
- Relaying a new cancer diagnosis
- Stopping active treatment
- How to have a family meeting
- How to discuss end of life care
- How to conduct a family meeting
- Eliciting and responding to emotional cues

The new Department of Health supportive care resources will be utilised in the delivery of the workshops. This aligns with the following:

- Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-11 (VCAP)^{iv}
- "Providing optimal cancer care: Supportive Care Policy for Victoria"^v
- SMICS Supportive Care Strategic Plan 2009-12^{vi}

Approval to proceed with the program has been obtained from the CEOs of each of the above mentioned health services and the SMICS Governance Committee. The project is now underway with plans to deliver 18 workshops and 2 mentoring sessions by November 2012.

ⁱ Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008-2011, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Victoria 2008

ⁱⁱ Back A. Patient-physician communications in oncology: what does the evidence show? *Oncology* 2006; 20: 67-74.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ong LM., Visser MR, Lammes FB, De Haes JC. Doctor-patient communication and cancer patients' quality of life and satisfaction. *Patient Educ Couns* 200; 41: 145-56.

^{iv} Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Victoria's cancer action plan 2008-2011. 2008, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne

^v Victorian government Department of Human Services, Providing optimal cancer care. Supportive care policy for Victoria. 2009, Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services division, Melbourne.

^{vi} Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Services, SMICS Supportive Care Plan 2009-12. 2009, Melbourne