

PRIORITIES for CANCER SURGERY RESEARCH in ONTARIO

Background

With integration of the cancer centres into their host hospitals, effective January 2004, Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) will focus on developing guidelines and standards, monitoring and reporting on cancer-related practice and outcomes, and facilitating and undertaking research. Stakeholders attending an overall strategic planning retreat hosted by the Surgical Oncology program in February 2003 expressed overwhelming support and interest in participating in research related to cancer surgery.

The Surgical Oncology program hosted a second retreat on October 10, 2003 to explore approaches to furthering cancer surgery research in Ontario. Specific objectives were to develop an inventory describing *translational*, *clinical* and *health services* research related to cancer surgery recently published or taking place, and prioritize research interests, highlighting necessary resources.

Methods

The agenda included presentations on the direction of a research function at CCO (T. Sullivan), an update on the provincial tumour-banking initiative (B. Zanke), the status of cancer surgery research in Ontario based on the aforementioned inventory (E. Grunfeld), and human resource needs (B. Langer). Two speakers described their experiences in establishing successful Ontario research initiatives – the Cancer Care and Epidemiology research program from the Queen's Cancer Research Institute and the Ontario Clinical Oncology Group (P. Groome and K. Pritchard, respectively).

Participants were then allocated to three different breakout groups focusing on translational, clinical or health services research, facilitated by Drs. A. Guha, J. Pater and E. Grunfeld, respectively. Each group was asked to recommend cancer surgery research topics or issues, and possible enablers and barriers. Priorities were presented to the full assembly by the facilitators, and this was followed by a full group discussion.

Results

Participants included representatives of funding agencies and research groups, surgeons from cancer centres and community hospitals across

Ontario, clinician researchers and oncologists, surgical trainees and fellows, and executive management from CCO.

The inventory of cancer surgery research revealed a range of translational, clinical and health services research being conducted in Ontario by researchers and clinicians representing different disciplines. Further systematic review is required with expert input to identify disease-specific needs and gaps.

Many common themes were expressed across the three breakout groups and the full group discussion. To suggest next steps recurring suggestions were grouped together, which led to the following recommendations:

1. Create a research office with a Director of Research for surgical oncology, with sufficient infrastructure and funding to maintain a database of researchers, research and training positions; assist with grant preparation; and improve links with existing research groups.
2. Implement a strategy for training, recruitment and retention of surgeon investigators, surgical oncologists and cancer surgeons involved in research, and other health care professionals who would take part in cancer surgery research.
3. Promote the integration of research into clinical practice by developing forums that promote and enable activities such as mentoring and the formalization of "communities of practice".
4. Develop an accessible information system to support oncology research.
5. Establish a process for quality improvement of the research program itself through program monitoring and evaluation.

Next Steps

Specific recommendations made by retreat participants and suggested next steps will be considered within CCO and distributed to retreat participants and other stakeholders to explore feasibility of next steps, locus of responsibility, and possible collaborations to accomplish these goals.