

ASPERT

Bulletin | June 2022



AOTEAROA AUSTRALIA PANCREATIC ENZYME REPLACEMENT THERAPY RESEARCH GROUP

FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

AMANDA LANDERS



The last three months have passed by in a blur for the ASPERT team. We have been using all our resources to promote the patient survey study across Australia and New Zealand, with some success. The best outcome has been the increasing connections with people from both countries diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. They want to tell us their stories or ask for some advice. We have been able to connect people with more support, and arm them with information for their own self-management. It is such a great privilege in a research environment to see tangible benefits for participants. The survey study will be closing July 31st so now is the time to let your colleagues and patients know this a way in which they can help themselves and future generations.

The ASPERT team also has teamed up with Sophie Hooke (see her profile later in the bulletin), a dietitian student completing her Masters at the University of Auckland. Sophie is leading our clinician survey study, tasked with finding out how our colleagues use PERT and what they may need in terms of education. This study will be opening very soon so we will be asking you to send that link out to anyone you can think of who may prescribe PERT in their workplaces. Over the next few months, while the clinician survey is running, we will be starting to analyse data and disseminate results. We will also be planning a half-day workshop in November to plan the next piece of work informed by the research. Exciting times!

Ngā mihi, Amanda

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SURVEY PROGRESS

CHARLOTTE CAHILL

I am very excited to announce that we have reached our target of 100 responses for the New Zealand arm of the PERT patient survey. The ASPERT team has been working incredibly hard to broadcast the survey across New Zealand to reach this milestone. However, the work is not over yet, as we have not yet reached our 200 response target for the Australian arm of the survey. **The Australian survey remains open for the next 5 weeks.** We need everyone to continue promoting the Australian survey as much as possible.



TEAM NEWS

SOPHIE HOOKE



Kia Ora! My name is Sophie Hooke and I am a Masters student at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. It is my pleasure to be working alongside the ASPERT team, as part of my thesis research, on the PERT clinician survey. A little bit about me...

In 2020, I graduated from the University of Otago with a Bachelor of Science majoring in Human Nutrition. Last year, I returned to Auckland to undertake a Masters of Health Sciences in Nutrition and Dietetics with aspirations of becoming a Registered Dietitian. I am currently in my final year of my Masters and only 6 months away from achieving that dream! I have a strong passion for gastroenterology, oncology and hepatobiliary conditions so this research is in an area I have a deep interest in. I have found a real love for connecting with patients and understanding the impact that nutrition and dietetics can have on a patient's experience with illness. Whilst being a novice in the world of research seemed daunting initially, as soon as this thesis project came to life and the opportunity to collaborate with ASPERT arose, I knew it was the right fit for me! Outside of my studies, I love to be outdoors, whether that be walking, tramping, skiing, or swimming. It may not come as a surprise to most that I am a keen foodie and love to cook and bake for family and friends! I am so grateful to have this opportunity to be working alongside the ASPERT team to carry out this research. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly. I look forward to carrying out this research and expanding my understanding in the palliative care and pancreatic cancer space.

THE CLINICAN SURVEY

SOPHIE HOOKE

Pancreatic exocrine insufficiency (PEI) is a well-established phenomenon post-pancreaticoduodenectomy (PD) and in patients with advanced pancreatic cancer. Signs and symptoms of PEI include postprandial pain, abdominal bloating and discomfort, steatorrhea, indigestion, weight loss and malnutrition which impact on the quality of life and overall survival of pancreatic cancer patients. Internationally, the mainstay of treatment for PEI is pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT). Despite the established efficacy of PERT and improvements on overall survival, PEI remains undertreated. International studies report low rate of PERT prescribing despite international guidelines recommending PERT as an integral part of treatment in pancreatic cancer.

University of Auckland Masters student Sophie Hooke has teamed up with ASPERT, in collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney, to carry out research in this area. Data will be collected via an electronic survey to investigate the practices of clinicians in Australia and New Zealand with prescribing PERT in patients with unresectable pancreatic cancer and post-PD. This research aims to ask clinicians about their experience with prescribing and monitoring PERT, how decisions are made regarding dosing and timing of PERT and how the efficacy of PERT is monitored.

The results of this study will help inform a larger international survey and identify gaps in clinician knowledge to inform the potential development of an education program to address these. The findings from this survey will also help improve the care of pancreatic cancer patients in Australasia.

If you are a clinician in this area and would be interested in responding to our survey, we would greatly appreciate your help! **The New Zealand branch of the survey is now open! Please follow the link below.**

The New Zealand clinician's survey

To our Australian colleagues keep your eyes peeled for the Australian arm of the survey which will be opening soon.

PANKIND WEBINAR

HELEN BROWN

On the 10 May Amanda and I were invited to present a Webinar for PanKind (Australian Pancreatic Cancer Foundation) on Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement therapy and the research we have done in this area.

We were thrilled to have 117 registrations from throughout Australia and New Zealand.

During the Webinar we discussed managing diet for someone with pancreatic cancer, and how the pancreas works, explaining what role it plays in digestion. We discussed how to gain the best results from the enzymes by taking it at the right times and in the correct dose. We then provided information about the ASPERT research group and explained how our results may help people with pancreatic cancer.

Overall the Webinar was well accepted and we will use feedback from registrants to assist us with direction of further research.

We are making a difference...

Anna (not her real name) contacted Amanda after the Webinar to share her experience of PERT. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2019 and underwent a Whipple's surgery. She was discharged from hospital on Creon 10,000 and continued to suffer symptoms of malabsorption for the following 2 years. She was placed on Loperamide in the interim for her "diarrhoea" but continued to have troubling symptoms.

After taking part in the Webinar she contacted her GP and after some discussion was put on Creon 25,000 with good effect. She has since requested a referral to the dietitian to work with her to adjust the dose of Creon and stabilize her weight.

If you wish to view the Webinar it is posted on the Pankind website or on the ASPERT website.

Helen Brown
ASPERT Research Dietitian

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