



Media Release

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A research first for bowel cancer in New Zealand

A Bowel Cancer New Zealand funded study is the first to present bowel cancer patients' perspectives and experiences of the pathways to diagnosis in New Zealand. The University of Otago study found significant delays were experienced by many participants.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand (NZ) spokesperson Professor Sarah Derrett says, "This study indicates inequities in terms of obtaining a timely diagnosis exist in New Zealand. People aged under 60, with no tertiary qualification, having a poor first experience with a healthcare professional, and people diagnosed in public hospitals (compared to private) took longer to obtain a diagnosis."

The researchers note it seems likely socioeconomic factors are related to delay – where wealthier people are able to pay for investigations such as private colonoscopy (which cost approximately \$3000), but this being beyond the reach of many New Zealanders. "Bowel Cancer NZ believes all New Zealanders should have the same opportunities of a timely diagnosis of bowel cancer no matter your income; being diagnosed at an earlier stage increases the chance of survival", says Derrett.

The study also highlights a lack of public knowledge around bowel cancer symptoms and the need for future education initiatives to rectify this. Zoe Windner, a third-year medical student who collected the data as a summer student based in Preventive and Social Medicine at the Dunedin School of Medicine says, "The importance of patients knowing to talk to their healthcare providers about bowel cancer symptoms was confirmed, even if symptoms seem intermittent".

A larger HRC-funded study led by Professor Lawrenson is underway elsewhere. "Our findings support the need for this research which will be able to consider, with larger patient numbers, delays to obtaining a timely diagnosis," says Derrett.

Bowel Cancer NZ encourages open discussion about bowel cancer with medical professionals and avoiding 'sitting on your symptoms'. Symptoms include:

- Bleeding from the bottom or seeing blood in the toilet after a bowel motion;
- Change of bowel motions over several weeks without returning to normal;
- Persistent or periodic severe pain the abdomen;
- A lump or mass in the abdomen;
- Tiredness and loss of weight for no particular reason;
- Anaemia.

Those who don't live in DHB screening areas or have symptoms or a family history of bowel cancer and want to do regular checks can talk to their GP.

More information on bowel cancer and Bowel Cancer NZ can be found at www.bowelcancernz.org.nz

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About Bowel Cancer New Zealand

- Bowel Cancer New Zealand (NZ) is a patient- focused charity organisation.
- The registered charity was founded in 2010 by a group of people affected by bowel cancer, committed to improving bowel cancer awareness and outcomes for people with the disease.
- Bowel Cancer NZ aims to provide clear and up-to-date information about the disease, symptoms, what to do if diagnosed and to support patients and families affected by bowel cancer.
- The ultimate aim of Bowel Cancer NZ is to prevent lives being lost to this disease and to promote the national screening program rollout in New Zealand.