

spanc

Study of the Prevention of Anal Cancer

ISSUE 8 JUNE 2015

Welcome to those of you who have just joined SPANC and greetings to the other 585 men already enrolled! We will stop recruiting at the end of July this year, so if you know anyone who's been thinking about joining, please encourage them to contact us soon or they'll miss out. We are very pleased to say that we'll achieve our target of 600 men enrolled, thanks to all of you.

What's in this newsletter?

- The SPANC Information Night
- New faces in the SPANC team
- Q&A - Our doctors answer some of the questions asked at the SPANC Information Night

New SPANC staff



Piero Pezzopane

Piero started in SPANC in October 2014. He has worked for many years in various Commonwealth department administrative roles, and has also worked in Hospitality,

including many years at the Sydney Opera House. As a SPANC Research Assistant (RA) Piero assists in making your bookings, and all SPANC-related administration at The Kirby Institute. He also assists at the St Vincent's Hospital clinic greeting participants and ensuring the clinic visits occur efficiently and smoothly.



Marko Garcia

Marko started working for SPANC in April 2015 as a casual relief nurse. His background is urology/gynaecology nursing. He has been working for St Vincent's Private Hospital for the past 10 years and is enjoying his new role at SPANC as one of the nursing staff.



David Ninham

David joined SPANC in December last year after a 4 year stint as a ward nurse at St Vincent's Private Hospital followed by some HIV research at IBAC, just before joining SPANC. My past lives include working in media with the ABC and as a classical guitar teacher. This one is definitely the most engaging!

SPANC Information Night

On March 25th 2015, around 140 SPANC participants attended the first SPANC Information Evening, hosted by Associate Professor Richard Hillman. The audience heard key speakers from the community as well as frontline SPANC staff and Study Investigators. Up-to-date results and data from SPANC were presented and the future directions of the Study were discussed. In an effort to make the evening fun as well as informative we had some good wholesome food

for supper, and also some terrific door prizes! These prizes were generously donated by 'The Hydro Majestic Hotel, Medlow Bath', 'Australian Chamber Orchestra', 'Opera Australia', 'Sydney Skin', and the much-loved 'Kath and Kim'. Thank you to all those generous organisations - and foxy individuals - that helped make the evening a success and also provided a few laughs while discussing a serious subject.



Piero & Robbie welcome participants on the SPANC information night



Assoc/Prof Richard Hillman MC

more SPANC Information night overleaf

SPANC Information Night - Video Messages



Professor Andrew Grulich Chief Principal Investigator, The SPANC Study, welcomed all the participants to the evening via video and apologised that he was not able to be there in person – he was asked at short notice to address the World Health Organisation in Geneva. His video presentation on “The rationale behind SPANC” and some preliminary findings will be available on the SPANC website shortly.



The Hon. Michael Kirby sent his greeting from the SPANC ‘engine room’ (the Research Assistants’ office at the Kirby Institute, UNSW) He stated he supports “the work of SPANC and honours the volunteers in contributing to this medical research in the interest of the gay community, Australia and the world where the Kirby Institute is at the cutting edge of research in this area.” He thanked everyone sincerely for their volunteer participation.



Professor David Cooper, Director of The Kirby Institute UNSW, thanked the volunteers in SPANC for their hard work and for their dedication in helping this very hands-on research. He went on to say “Your commitment to this important study is something the community can be very proud of”.



Mr Nicolas Parkhill - Chief Executive Officer at ACON said “...a big thanks to all those who have been participating in the SPANC research project which is absolutely critical and will inform future service delivery around anal cancer screening. We know it’s a health issue in our community and we need the data to consistently work with policy makers to get this issue on the policy agenda so that screening programs can be put in place”. He said he was “grateful for the support from the SPANC participants” and thanked them for their efforts.



Ms Tanya Plibersek, Deputy Leader of the Opposition said “the work the volunteers do in this research is critical in winning the battle against anal cancer. In Australia the gay community has a proud history of working closely with experts to combat serious health issues. This study shows that excellent work continues.”



Speakers at the **SPANC** Information Night...



Mr Ben Wilcock from AFAO told the audience about 'The Bottom Line' campaign and its website thebottomline.org.au, an anal health resource for gay and other men who have sex with men. Gay men (and particularly HIV-positive gay men) are at a greater risk of developing some HPV-related cancers compared with the general population. The campaign's aim is to educate our various community groups about the different aspects of HPV, warts and anal cancer.



Prof Richard Hillman Principal Clinical Investigator, The SPANC Study, spoke on 'Why SPANC is so important to gay men's health'. He noted anal cancer is a condition associated with a lot of pain and embarrassment. Treatment of anal cancer can be very unpleasant. If diagnosed early it is nearly 100% curable. SPANC has devised a traffic light system which identifies those participants found (during the course of the study) to be at higher risk of developing cancer. During the 6th (final 'review') visit participants can discuss their individual risk levels ascertained from the data collected during the course of the study. SPANC is working hard to ensure that all participants who complete the study have appropriate follow up care, where needed.



Dr Carmella Law St Vincent's Hospital, Site Principal Investigator, The SPANC Study, presented on *The Art of Anus Whispering*. Carmella noted that the HRA procedure could be awkward for the participant. She presented pointers that she gave to the SPANC anoscopists to help ease these concerns. She emphasised how important it is for everyone in the SPANC team to listen to the feed-back from participants, and endeavour to modify the techniques in order to minimise discomfort to the participants.



Mr Patrick McGrath, one of the SPANC Research Assistants, spoke on participant survey feedback and how essential it's been to the enhancement of the Study since it began in 2010. He said that the insights we get from your feedback will assist in the foundation of any future anal cancer screening programs. Finally he thanked the participants for all their support, without which, he emphasised, the study wouldn't exist.



Mr Lance Feeney, Policy Analyst for Positive Life NSW thanked the SPANC participants for the important role they play by participating in the study. He said that the results are important to discover the risk factors for anal HPV and cancer, and how we can combat the high rates of anal cancer. He also stated that if anal cancer is detected early the prognosis can be very good.

Q & A

...the panel at the Information Night give some answers



Q: What form would an 'anal cancer screening test' be likely to take in the future?

A: We already have the digital examination for detection of anal cancer. Instead of DRE (Digital Rectal Examination), we are advocating to include Anal examination to make the procedure D.A.R.E. (Digital Anal Rectal Examination). Although we are a little way off before we can say for certain it is likely to involve a swab and new tests to distinguish serious from transient human papillomavirus infection. America and Europe are closely watching the results of the SPANC study in particular to see what direction we take in the future.

Q: Why do some of my pap tests come back 'unsatisfactory'?

A: This term "unsatisfactory" is a function of the way anal paps are reported. Only a small number of abnormal cells need to be present to report a test as abnormal (eg LSIL, HSIL). However, a much larger number of normal cells need to be seen on the specimen for the laboratory to confidently report the specimen as "negative". Thus, if there are insufficient cells collected during the pap test, the result is reported as 'unsatisfactory', and the participant is asked to come in again for another test. Different anal swabbing techniques have been used during the SPANC study to obtain the best cell sample. This has led to fewer "unsatisfactory" swab results. However there will unfortunately always be a small number of participants who will have an "unsatisfactory" swab result, no matter how hard the doctor tries to get the best specimen.

Q: Is there any connection between psychological well-being and someone receiving high-grade test results?

A: Early SPANC results are showing that HIV positive men who have a baseline score suggesting poorer psychological well-being, completed before any clinical procedures are done, are more likely to have high grade test results. We continue to explore these issues.

Q: Why are some guys more likely to have high-grade cells than other guys?

A: We are all unique individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. This also applies to our own unique immune systems. If someone in a family has the flu, not everyone will catch it from them, despite being exposed. We believe that a similar effect means that some people have stronger reactions to HPV infection than others, despite having similar exposures. HIV positive gay men have a slightly greater risk of having a high grade abnormality than HIV negative men.

Q & A

...continued from page 4

Q: Will SPANC share its findings with other countries so that everyone can benefit universally?

A: Yes, what we do first is check, then double and triple check our findings. We are already presenting preliminary findings from SPANC at national and international conferences. Others in similar fields may find some of our findings of benefit, and we may find benefit in their studies. Although it is very early days for SPANC, we are already publishing in very high ranking journals.

Q: When will SPANC present the data to Health Organisations?

A: SPANC data collection will be complete by the end of 2018. Analysis of the final data will take around 6 months. Once complete we'll present this data to the Health Departments either directly or indirectly through our 'Protocol Steering Committee' which has members from hospitals and various Health Departments.

Q: Vaccination against the HPV virus in young males appears to be more widespread in western nations than in poorer countries. Is this something that the World Health Organisation should be looking into and rectifying?

A: The World Health Organisation Position Paper on 'Vaccines against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) 2014' states: "HPV vaccination of males is not recommended as a priority, especially in resource-constrained settings, as the available evidence indicates that the first priority should be for cervical cancer reduction by timely vaccination of young females and high coverage with each dose." One of the main reasons is that of cost-effectiveness. What has been found with vaccination of women is that you get 'herd protection' where heterosexual men receive cover from their female partners. Studies have shown that where countries have vaccinated women, rates of genital warts have fallen dramatically amongst females and their male partners. However, in the gay population in these same countries rates of genital warts have not changed.



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With
Many Thanks
to the wonderful
organisations and individuals
who donated so generously to the

SPANC Information Night

'The Hydro Majestic Hotel, Medlow Bath'
'Australian Chamber Orchestra'
'Kath and Kim'
'Opera Australia'
'Sydney Skin'



SPANC is funded through the Australian Government's chief medical research agency, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Cancer Council of NSW. The total through these two sources is over \$3 million.

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"Thank you for your support"