

**GREEN SHOOTS OF HOPE EMERGE IN
PANCREATIC CANCER AWARENESS MONTH**

THREE NEW TRIALS SET TO TARGET KEY STAGES OF DISEASE

Campaigning for pancreatic cancer awareness has historically been marked by strong participation among Kiwis, who have helped spread information to support education and early diagnosis and backed initiatives to expand support for patients and their whānau enduring one of our most deadly cancers. This year's Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month led by the Gut Cancer Foundation (GCF) brings new hope for action and a sea change in how we combat the disease, as three separate, major clinical trials promise to zero in on different stages of pancreatic cancer and, potentially, several other cancers.

There is real urgency for more diagnostic and treatment advances among clinicians and researchers, as well as the GCF and its many supporters. Pancreatic cancer has one of the lowest survival rates of all major cancers, partly because symptoms are often vague, mild, missed, or ignored, meaning that 80 to 95 percent of those diagnosed are in stage 3 or 4 and past the point of curative surgery. At least 720 New Zealanders are diagnosed and more than 600 die from with pancreatic cancer each year.

The GCF is both funding New Zealand-generated research (IPMN) and giving New Zealanders access to international clinical trials. The three trials are designed to target three different stages of pancreatic cancer: preventing IPMN pancreatic cysts from developing into cancer; reversing or delaying tumour growth to increase the chances of curative surgery; and, in later stages, funding new, innovative treatment to extend life and to improve quality of life. Two trials, ASCEND and MASTERPLAN, are international, brought to Aotearoa by GCF through its collaboration with its Australian counterpart (Australasian Gastrointestinal Trials Group), and IPMN is a New Zealand-driven trial being set up here.

Fundraising continues to play a vital role in improving outcomes for pancreatic cancer patients and has been critical to getting the three new trials off the ground. To date GCF has committed \$149,000 to ASCEND and MASTERPLAN, and \$100,000 to IMPN (the latter

includes \$80,000 raised from the PanCan Gala in 2022). GCF continues to generate donations and long-term investment in research.

Liam Willis, Executive Officer at GCF, says, “The way to shift the dial on pancreatic cancer outcomes is by making advances in diagnosis and treatment, and these are found through research, which GCF has fundraised for over many years. This Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month we are telling our supporters and the New Zealand public about this research, what it means for public health, and how they can help themselves and others when it comes to pancreatic cancer awareness, early intervention, and hopefully prevention.

“Giving New Zealanders with pancreatic cancer access to these three trials is great progress, but we can still do much more. We are working actively to attract more funds, which is the mechanism by which we can put more Kiwis through trials. Clinical trials are a way Kiwis can access an international standard of care, including new treatments and unfunded treatments, but they are not currently as accessible as they should be.

“The lack of access to trials we see for New Zealanders is, unfortunately, another example of how we are falling behind equivalent jurisdictions, and it exacerbates the inequity of access to gold standard treatments.

“Generally, the funding pool for research in New Zealand is quite small, but for clinical trials in particular it is very difficult. As a result, New Zealanders miss out on access to the latest treatment options. Long-term funding is crucial to keep bringing research to New Zealand and involving Kiwis.

“We call on the new government to honour its election campaign commitment to improve our national healthcare provision. One important way to do this is by increasing public funding of cancer trials to save lives and create much better outcomes across the population.”

Clinical trials, as real-life studies involving patients, often produce major advances and are the best way to define exactly which medications, surgical techniques and radiation treatments work best to help patients. Depending on the trial type, it can cost up to \$10,000 for each patient on a trial.

The trials cover three different patient cohorts:

- 1) ASCEND – Advanced/ metastatic patients, who have some of the worst outcomes of any cancer patients and very limited treatment options.

- 2) MASTERPLAN – Locally advanced patients who have the potential for curative surgery.
- 3) IPMN study - Patients at high risk who have not yet developed pancreatic cancer but have limited preventative treatment options.

The GCF is funding six different geographic locations to allow access by as many New Zealanders as possible:

- 1) Auckland – ASCEND
- 2) Waikato – ASCEND & IPMN
- 3) Dunedin - ASCEND
- 4) Waitemata – IPMN
- 5) Christchurch – MASTERPLAN
- 6) Wellington – MASTERPLAN

To find out more about the Gut Cancer Foundation and pancreatic cancer, people can head to www.gutcancer.org.nz/pancreatic-cancer/ .

Fact Sheet

- Common symptoms of pancreatic cancer include:
 - Mid-back pain
 - Indigestion
 - Unexplained weight loss
 - Loss of appetite
 - Stomach pain
 - New-onset diabetes
 - Jaundice (yellowish eyes or skin)
 - Changes in stool
- In nearly every country, pancreatic cancer is the only major cancer with a single-digit five-year survival rate globally (2-9 percent), and 12 percent in New Zealand.
- Every day, more than 1,356 people worldwide will be diagnosed with and an estimated 1,276 will die from pancreatic cancer.
- Currently, there is no screening test or early detection method for pancreatic cancer.
- The cause of the majority of pancreatic cancer cases is unknown. There is evidence that age, smoking, being overweight, a family history of pancreatic cancer, pancreatitis, and diabetes may increase your risk of cancer.

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About the Gut Cancer Foundation

Gut cancer is the term for cancers of the digestive system, including the oesophagus, stomach, liver, gallbladder, bile ducts, pancreas and bowel. Each year, more than 6,000 New Zealanders are diagnosed with a gut cancer and half of these people will die within five years of diagnosis. It is collectively the most common form of cancer in New Zealand yet is rarely spoken about.

The Gut Cancer Foundation is committed to delivering an everlasting impact and positive change for all New Zealanders affected by gut cancers. With help from our communities and international networks we can fund expert research, education and increase awareness to help our loved ones live their lives free of life-threatening gut cancers.

www.gutcancer.org.nz