

A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR THE COLLECTION AND COLLATION OF  
DIETARY INTAKE DATA FROM CANCER PATIENTS

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One of the important reasons given for the maintenance of a cancer registry is its capacity to serve as a valuable resource for researchers interested in the causes, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The accumulated data can be used both for fundamental epidemiological studies and the development and evaluation of cancer control programs (Victorian Cancer Registry, 1983). The Victorian Cancer Registry currently collects data relating to primary site, histology and investigations relating to diagnosis as well as basic demographic data.

For several decades there has been considerable interest in the relationship of dietary patterns to the development of a number of cancers (National Research Council Committee on Diet, Nutrition and Cancer 1982). There is also evidence that nutritional status has prognostic implications for treatment outcome in some cancers (van Eys 1982; Linn et al. 1980). Although remaining inconclusive, epidemiological and metabolic studies have indicated associations between the risk of a number of cancers and various dietary factors which warrant further investigation (Doll 1988). Data on the past and present dietary habits of cancer patients is an important contribution to such investigations.

In public hospitals and health centres where dietitians are available, there is a largely untapped opportunity to trap data relating to the past and current dietary patterns and nutritional status of cancer patients. Often much of the relevant information is already collected for clinical purposes. The development of an appropriate tool for collecting and collating such data, and the establishment of an extensive network of interviewers (e.g. via the DAA Oncology Special Interest Groups) is being addressed by the Nutrition Unit at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute. Once trialled and refined, this tool could be used by dietitians at presenting hospitals and the data linked to existing Cancer Registries.

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