

“Medication at any cost? Exploring the unique partnership between Social Work and Pharmacy in a specialist cancer hospital.”

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Background

The Social Work Department at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has long recognised the specific financial strain that may be placed on patients and their families when accessing prescribed medication. As a response to this identified area of concern, a unique relationship has developed between the Social Work Department and Peter Mac Pharmacy. Social Work has formalised a process for advocating to the Director of Pharmacy for individual cases to be considered for a reduction or waiver of patient contribution fees where specific criteria are met.

Methods

The advocacy program has been running for many years without formal review. Formal review of the project involved data mining retrospective patient files for approved cases over a 12 month period in 2014. The aim of data mining was to understand the demographic patterns, identify contributing factors associated with increased financial burden and to develop a patient profile matrix to support early identification.

Results/Outcome

Issues identified as increasing risk of financial burden for patients and families included change in income status, employment status and the added burden of travel and accommodation costs associated with accessing cancer care. Many patients experience delays in accessing eligible Centrelink or other income benefits. This project has resulted in establishment of an efficient formal standard operating process and template for Social Workers to advocate in priority cases with the Director of Pharmacy. Further research will be undertaken in a second phase focused on consideration of the financial impact of pharmacy waivers/reductions and whether there is a broader benefit to earlier identification of financial risk for the organisation.