

# Indicators for effective oncology social work practice: an international audit

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## Background

The demand for oncology services is projected to grow significantly over the next 15 years due to the growth in the cancer population and expansion of therapeutic treatment options. This has implications for health care services already under pressure. The healthcare workforce is therefore expected to work effectively in partnership to address oncology practice needs. However, the nature of competencies across the different health disciplines in such an integrated healthcare model remains a focus of debate.

## Methods

An international collaboration aimed at an evidence-informed understanding of current social work practice in public hospitals in Australia and New Zealand was undertaken in three public hospitals. The study was approved as an observational study with the design comprising a prospective audit of usual hospital-based social work practice. The data was collected over a 24-hour time span via a spreadsheet divided into 15 minute intervals.

## Results

This presentation will describe the outcome from audit data of a sub-set of 25 oncology social workers in relation to the indicators for effective practice in this specialist field. The findings point to generic and discipline-specific competencies for hospital social workers and have relevance for workforce development.

## Discussion

The analysis highlights the importance of evidence based brief therapy skills as part of a broad based generic social work theoretical paradigm to promote an effective contribution to oncology patient care. These include the capacity to respond to referrals not only through a professionally-defined oncology social work role, but also in response to context-driven needs of both patients and the hospital.