Welcome to the first SPANC newsletter. Thank you to all of you who have joined SPANC so far. Your participation has played an important role in helping the study understand what works and what doesn’t and we’re constantly reviewing scheduling and procedures to improve your overall experience during your SPANC participation.

WHERE IS SPANC SO FAR?

SPANC started recruitment in September 2010 and has enrolled over 95 participants to date.

We are currently limited by space and staffing resources but hope in 2011 to employ a further two anoscopists and obtain more space for the study procedures to operate more efficiently and minimise the time needed to participate in the study.

Those of you returning for your first follow-up appointment will notice how much quicker the overall procedure will be. There will be no need to consent you again and the questionnaire has been reduced to around 10 minutes.

YOUR FEEDBACK – WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO IMPROVE SPANC SO FAR?

We appreciate your feedback and try to act on your suggestions wherever we can. Some of you have mentioned that logging into the SPANC website to complete your questionnaire in a public space can prove a little uncomfortable due to the SPANC logo on every page. We now offer you the option of logging directly into the questionnaire, bypassing the SPANC website and its logo.

We have also asked many of you if you would mind having a female anoscopist if we employed one in the future. Most of you said that you didn’t mind however we would always give you the option if/when we did employ a female anoscopist.

FAIR DAY 2011

SPANC had its first stall at Fair Day this year. More than 160 people gave us their names for follow up and hopefully eventual enrolment into the study. It seems that gay guys are concerned about the growing increase in anal cancer and are keen to be involved in a study that is striving to promote regular anal screening for gay men.

SPANC would like to thank Auscreen and Ego who generously donated thousands of sunscreen samples for distribution at the Fair.

MAG MEETING 12 APR 2011

A group of SPANC team members attended the April meeting of MAG (Mature Aged Gays) held at ACON to give a presentation on the SPANC study. The meeting was well attended by about 120 people with around 30 people showing interest in joining the study. We were all impressed by the warmth and hospitality shown by the group.
The great majority of cases of anal cancer are caused by infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV is the virus that is known to cause cervical cancer in women. There are more than 100 types of HPV. Some types cause genital warts and other types cause more than 90% of anal cancer. HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection that most gay men get at some stage in their lives. Most gay men with HPV do not develop anal cancer.

Risk factors for anal cancer include the following:
- Being older: over 45 years old if HIV– or over 35 years old if HIV+.
- Having many sexual partners and having receptive anal sex (these reflect the risk of anal HPV infection).
- Smoking cigarettes.

It is not know what causes a small minority of those men with anal HPV infection to develop anal cancer.

The treatment of cancer of the anus usually involves radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Cancers that arise outside of the anus in the skin are termed perianal skin cancers or anal margin cancers. These are treated as skin cancers and not as true anal cancers.

WHO PERFORMS THE HIGH RESOLUTION ANOSCOPY?
Currently we have two doctors who will perform the High Resolution Anoscopies (HRAs). They are Richard Hillman and Dave Templeton. We are training more doctors to enable the further expansion of the study.

Richard Hillman is one of the co-investigators for the SPANC study and is the main anoscopist performing the High Resolution Anoscopies (HRAs). Following specialist training in HIV medicine and sexual health, Richard ran a large HIV unit in London, before moving back to Scotland. Since arriving in Australia in 2001, he has been Course Coordinator and initiated a major redevelopment and expansion of the University of Sydney Masters of Medicine (STD/HIV) Program.

Richard has broad research interests in sexual health, including clinical aspects of HIV, the diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections and vulnerable populations. His doctorate was in the molecular epidemiology of Human Papillomaviruses. His research output includes more than 30 peer reviewed articles, nine letters, six review articles, two books, two book chapters, and more than 60 presentations at local and international meetings. He currently has a number of ongoing projects including in areas as diverse as anal cancer, sex workers and sexual health teaching.

Dave Templeton is a Sexual Health Physician who has been specialising in management of HIV and other STIs for over 10 years. Dave is currently a NHMRC postdoctoral researcher and Clinical Anoscopist for the SPANC study at St Vincent’s Hospital, having trained in Anoscopy in San Francisco and Sydney. Dave is also Manager and Staff Specialist at RPA Sexual Health in Sydney’s inner west, and Senior Lecturer at the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research. Dave completed his PhD in 2008 at the Kirby Institute (formerly NCHECR) on STIs and HIV in the Health in Men study. He has published almost 50 papers in the scientific literature, mostly regarding STIs and HIV in gay men.

WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED IN SPANC?
The SPANC team is made up of a large number of organisations that include investigators, community members, doctors, clinical and research staff and laboratory clinicians. Here are a few of the people that you may be in contact with as a participant in the SPANC study. All the members of the SPANC team are listed at the end of this newsletter.

The aim of SPANC is to determine whether regular anal testing should be introduced to prevent anal cancer.
Prior to her arrival in Australia Tara was involved in a large European teaching programme for the initiation of a new drug for the treatment of neuropathic pain and has taught at training sessions in both the UK and Ireland and provided support to clinicians using the product for the first time.

On a personal note Tara arrived in Australia in July 2010 with her partner and two small dogs and as well as her commitment to Clinical Trials Nursing she also has a passion for the welfare of animals.

Brian has worked with the SPANC study since April 2010 assisting in the questionnaire development and implementation. He began work with the Kirby Institute in 2001 and has worked on other cohort studies such as the Health in Men Study (HIM) and Positive Health (pH).

This committee meets fortnightly at the moment to review any clinical issues raised for discussion.

from left: Richard Hillman, Richard Norris, Dave Templeton, Dorothy Machalek, Ali Sevehon, Winnie Tong, Tara Maher, Patrick McGrath, Mary Poynent, Brian Acraman, Jeff Jin, Andrew Grulich.

Recruitment to SPANC is currently via Facebook advertisements, advertising banners on the ACON and Positive Life websites, word of mouth and community events such as Fair Day.

At your first visit the study doctor or nurse will review the consent forms with you and answer any questions before you are asked to sign.

This is an Audio Computer Assisted Self Interview (ACASI) questionnaire which you complete in private and at your own pace on a touch-screen computer. The first interview normally takes around ½ hour to an hour to complete. At follow-up visits, it is much shorter (about 10 minutes).

The nurse will perform standard STI testing using venepuncture (blood tests urine samples and anal and throat swabs. The HRA is performed last. After this is completed, you’re free to leave or to rest a moment in the waiting room or at the St Vincents coffee shop where you can use a $10 refreshment voucher provided by the nurse.

At two weeks, and again at three months, after you receive your test results we will ask you to complete a brief 10 minute questionnaire online via our website. The purpose of these questionnaires is to help assess your wellbeing after the HRA procedure and receiving your test results. This is also a good opportunity for participants to tell us what worked well with the procedure and/or where we could improve things to make the procedures more comfortable and informative.

These follow-up visits (approximately every six months over the three years of the Study), will help provide further important information on the way the human papillomavirus affects anal health. They will also assist in keeping participants informed of any changes to their anal health.
SPANC TIMELINE

2009–10 Planning and setting up of the study before approval sought by St Vincent’s ethics committee and the University of New South Wales’ ethics committee.

2010–11 Approval granted by St Vincent’s and the University of New South Wales’ ethics committees. Study begins recruitment in September 2010.

2011 Recruitment of new participants continues through the year. Six monthly follow-ups begin.

2012 Six monthly follow-ups continue.

2013 Six monthly follow-ups continue.

2014 Six monthly follow-ups continue.

2015 Final data analysis commences.

WHAT MORE CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

If you are reading this e-newsletter, you will probably have already enrolled in the study. If not and you feel you’d like to be a part of this important project, simply complete the registration page on the SPANC website and we’ll get back to you and answer any questions before making an appointment for you. And don’t forget to encourage your friends to check out the SPANC website and hopefully join in this important study as well.

THE SPANC TEAM

The Kirby Institute (formerly the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research)

Principal Investigator
Professor Andrew Grulich

Co-Investigator
Associate Professor Garrett Prestage

Co-Investigators
Dr Mary Poynten
Professor Matthew Law
Dr Dave Templeton
Dr Jeff Jin
Associate Professor Richard Hillman

Research Assistants
Patrick McGrath
Brian Acraman

St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney

Co-Investigator
Professor Andrew Carr

Clinical Research Manager
Mr Richard Norris

Anoscopist
Associate Professor Richard Hillman
Dr Dave Templeton
Dr Winnie Tong

Research Nurses
Tara Maher
Ali Sevehon

Research Assistant
Brian Acraman

Sexually Transmitted Infections Research Centre (STIRC) Westmead

Co-Investigator
Associate Professor Richard Hillman
Dr Jeff Jin

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre and the University of Melbourne

Co-Investigator
Professor Christopher Fairley

Royal Women’s Hospital Melbourne and the University of Melbourne

Co-Investigator
Professor Suzanne Garland

Dept of Microbiology, Royal Women’s Hospital, Melbourne

Co-Investigator
Associate Professor Sepehr Tabrizi

Douglas Hanly Moir Pathology

Co-Investigators
Professor Annabelle Farnsworth
Dr Jennifer Roberts
Ms Adele Richards

School of Public Health, University of Sydney

Co-Investigators
Dr Kirsten McCaffery
Dr Kirsten Howard

Positive Life

Community Representatives
Dr Kathy Triffitt
Mr Rob Lake

ACON
Mr Ian Walker

Data Safety Management Board

A data safety monitoring board (DSMB) meets every 6 months to review study recruitment, any adverse or serious events and ethics concerns. This board is currently made up of:

Professor Andrew Grulich
Associate Professor Richard Hillman
Professor Andrew Carr
Dr Kathy Petoumenos
Dr Kirsten McCaffery
Mr Ian Walker

SPANC is funded through the Australian Government’s chief medical research agency, the National Health and Medical Research Council. Over the life of SPANC, more than $1.5 million will be invested in anal cancer prevention.